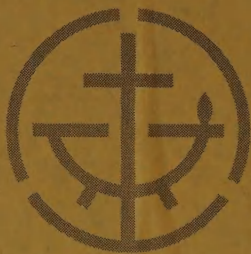


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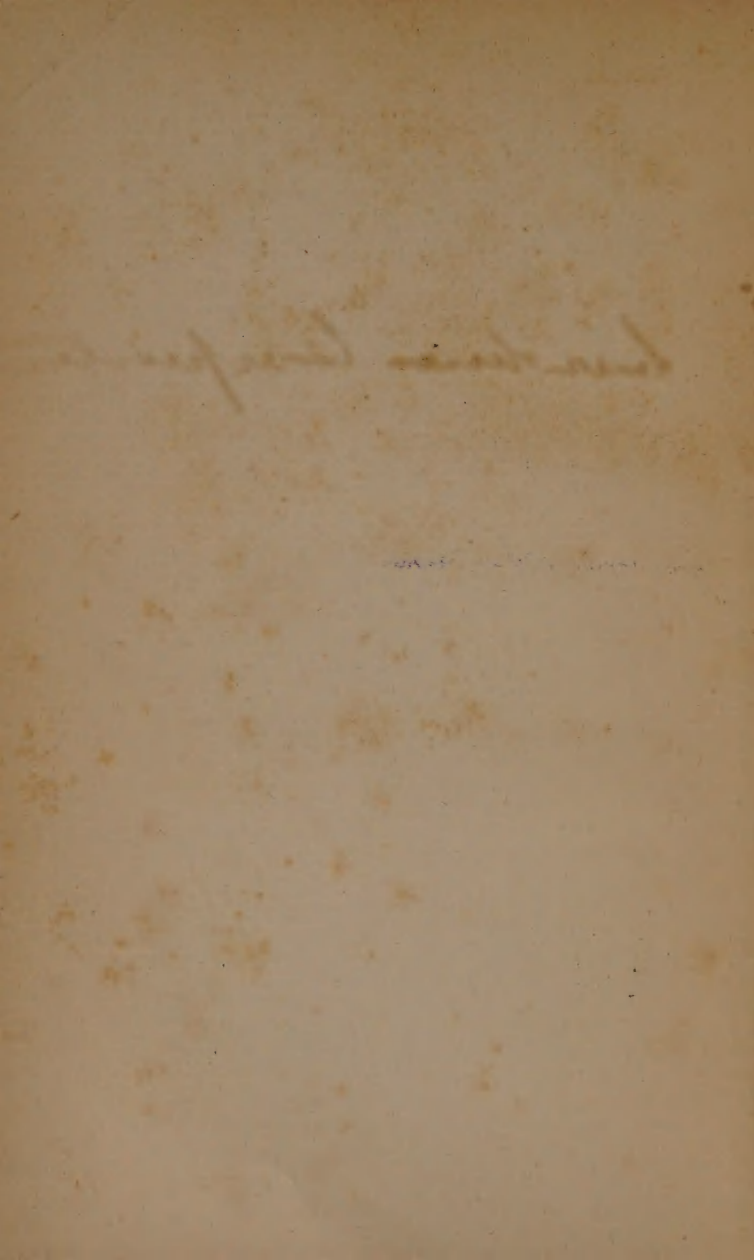
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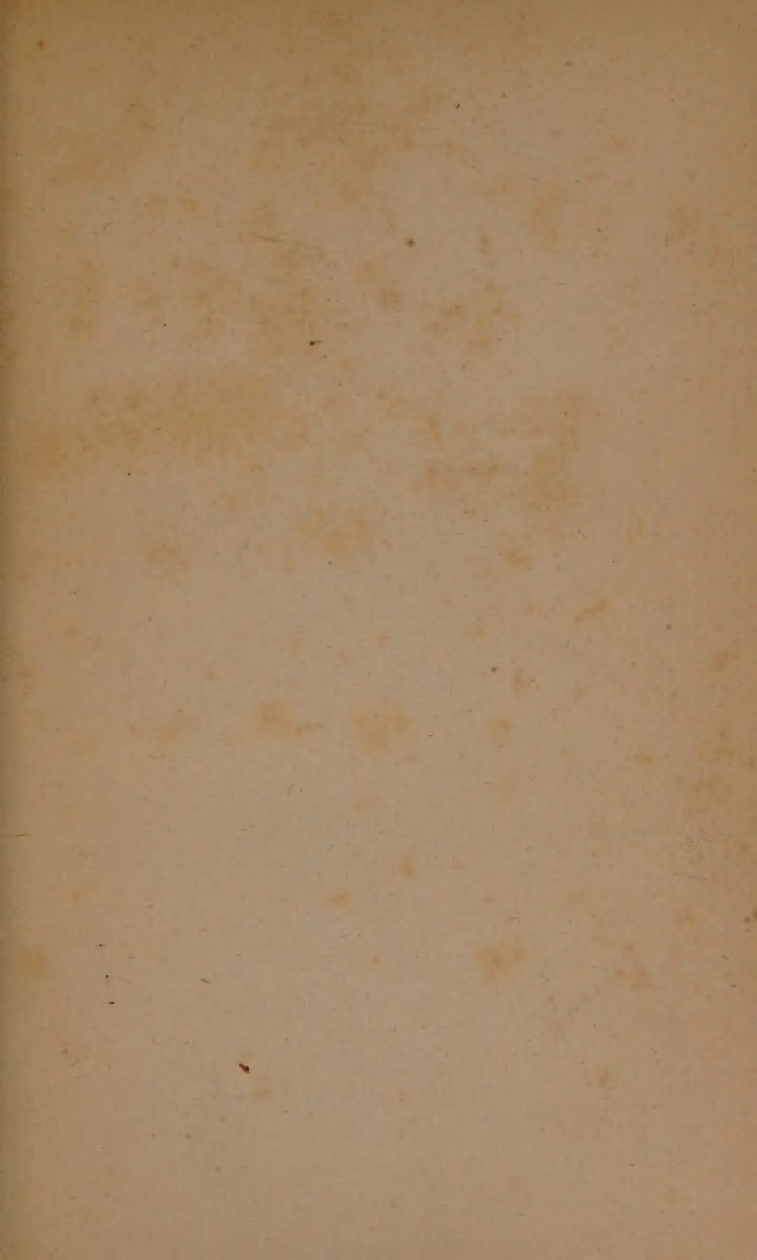


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THE
VEIL PARTLY LIFTED
AND
JESUS
BECOMING VISIBLE.

W. H. FURNESS

AUTHOR OF "REMARKS ON THE FOUR GOSPELS," "JESUS AND HIS
BIOGRAPHERS," "A HISTORY OF JESUS," AND "THOUGHTS
ON THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JESUS OF
NAZARETH."



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WHICH is claiming too great power for man, to say that he is able to make fables, not to be distinguished from facts, the handiwork of God, or to hold, as I do, that fiction and fact can never be so mingled but that, sooner or later, we can separate the one from the other?

W. H. F.



I

WHEREIN THE TEACHING OF JESUS
WAS NEW





I

WHEREIN THE TEACHING OF JESUS WAS NEW

HE teaching of Jesus was new at the first, and it is new still, new in this the nineteenth century since it began to take possession of its rightful empire, the world.

But wherein is it new ?

Its novelty has long and everywhere been held to consist in what are popularly termed the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, such as the double nature of Christ, the trinity of the divine nature, the original depravity of human nature, and the atonement. But whether it comprehend any doctrines of this sort has always been disputed. Even if they do make a part of it, they were not new.

Long before Christ, the gods were believed to have walked the earth in the shape of men. And Plato, three centuries and a half before the

Christian era, taught a trinity in the divine nature, so that, as Gibbon has remarked in a well-known passage, "the Athenian sage marvelously anticipated one of the most surprising doctrines of the Christian revelation." The doctrine of the innate wickedness of human nature was also, like the trinity, an importation from Pagan philosophy. The essential corruption of matter, of which man is in part made, was a dogma so common in the East, that there early appeared in the Church an Oriental sect who, in their zeal for the perfection of Christ, maintained that his body had no corrupt material substance, but was only a phantom.

The doctrine of the Atonement, which is especially cherished as the distinguishing idea of Christianity, is only a form of the radical error from which false religion has sprung ever since the world began; the error, namely, of supposing that human guilt is to be expiated, not by change of character, but by offerings and sacrifices. The plain, hard duty of self-cleansing, men are forever trying to evade by all kinds of subterfuges, sometimes inhuman, most often childish. Flowers and fruits, the blood of animals and human blood, devoted upon altars, — the tables of the gods, — the endless repetition of formal prayers, postures of the body, pros-

trations, bendings of the knees, penances and pilgrimages, labor-saving praying implements, such as beads among the Roman Catholics, and water-wheels among the followers of the Grand Lama,¹—by things of this kind men endeavor to atone for the neglect of personal duty. That the Infinite Being has been sacrificed to expiate the sins of men, an idea which, had we not been familiarized to it from our childhood, would strike us as just as incredible as any of the extravagances of Hindoo mythology, is all of a piece with the above-mentioned expedients, the evident offspring of the ever-recurring disposition to immolate everything, even Almighty God himself, rather than do righteously. It is the world-old error, thinly disguised, culminating in its most monstrous form. Even if it were new, it has no place among the teachings of Jesus. He never taught this nor any of its associated dogmas. Not a word of his gives them the slightest color of his authority.

The question returns, then, Wherein was the teaching of Jesus new?

I do not consider what he taught as specially new in respect of what are called doctrines of any kind. Doctrines are commonly understood to be certain ideas in a verbal form, certain

¹ See Huc's Travels in Tartary, Thibet, etc.

sacred abstractions, having no direct bearing oftentimes upon conduct, incapable of being transmuted into life, but to which it is held essential to personal salvation that we should assent, and which must be received preliminarily to any hope or possibility of true obedience. Whereas the method of nature, to state it in Scripture phrase, requires us to do the truth in order to come to the light. Wherever stress is laid upon doctrines, as above defined, an utterly false standard of character is established.

Nothing of the kind finds any warrant in the teachings of Jesus. His language is, not by their doctrines, but by their fruits, are men to be known. There is scarcely a passage in the accounts of him where the word translated *doctrine* occurs, that it might not be as well or better rendered by the word *teaching*, referring, as it oftenest does, not so much to what he taught as to his manner of teaching.¹

It is true he demanded to be believed. But the confidence which he required to be reposed in him, is a very different thing from the doctrinal faith that has never ceased to rend the Church with controversy. It was faith in his personal truth, and not in any formal propositions. He demanded to be trusted because he

¹ Matt. vii. 28. Mark i. 27; iv. 2; xii. 38. John vii. 17.

knew — and all who heard him might have known, had they been honest — that what he was saying was true. He never expected people to forego the use of their understandings in deference to any authority save the authority of truth seen and admitted. He constantly referred them back to their own sense of things. He invariably spoke, in a manner the most direct and forcible, to the intelligence and conscience of those about him. The very reason why what he said provoked fierce opposition was, that it was felt to be true, and there was no disputing it but by violence. I know nothing more striking in him than the perfect respect which he paid to man's native sense of truth. The competency of the tribunal within is implied in every syllable that he breathed. It was the decisions of that that he affirmed. So far from imposing the slightest restriction upon human reason, the whole spirit of his teaching went to embolden it and set it free. The only mysteries that he ever proposed or spoke of were mysteries which, unlike the mysteries of the creeds, so far from forbidding inquiry, challenged it, — such as the parable of the Sower, for instance.¹ So that the faith which he required is shown to be the very opposite of the blind, unreasoning

¹ Matt. xiii. 11.

condition of mind which the faith of the theologians is understood to be.

I am not questioning that universal, abstract truths — doctrines, if you please so to call them — may be gathered from his history, just as they may be deduced from nature and from life. But as they are nowhere formally stated in nature, neither were they ever set forth by Jesus in the abstract shape of a creed.

It is true, he often expressed himself in general and universal terms, in precisely the same modes of speech which are appropriated to the statement of doctrines or abstractions. And he would thus appear to be announcing articles of faith for universal acceptance. But it will be found, I think, in almost every case in which he so expresses himself, that he has no thought of deliberately enunciating formulas of faith, but is speaking out of a full heart caused by some incident at the moment.¹ When he is not so speaking, his universal propositions will be found to be proverbs, those articles of faith, those creeds, which have grown out of the million times repeated experience of mankind.

It is a truth that cannot be kept too carefully in view, in the study of the life of Jesus, that, when one speaks from strong emotion, he always

¹ Matt. xii. 31, 32. Luke xviii. 24. John xi. 25, 26.

has recourse to universal, unqualified terms, and, so far as the forms of speech in which he expresses himself are concerned, there is no difference between him and another who is laying down formal philosophical or theological propositions. But there is all the difference in the world in the ways in which they are to be understood. The language of the one is to be taken to the letter. The language of passion requires to be qualified by reference to the occasion upon which it is uttered. When Jesus said, for example, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," — in order to see that he was not speaking, and did not think of being understood as speaking, to the letter, we must make allowance for the feeling under which he spoke, and which had been caused by the case of the rich young man, so blameless and prepossessing, who had just left him, and had shown himself unequal to the personal sacrifices which entrance into the kingdom of Truth required. Jesus did not mean to say that it is literally impossible for a rich man to relinquish his riches for the kingdom of heaven's sake, for it is not true. There have been rich men who have made every sacrifice cheerfully for the sake of Truth. But so deeply was he impressed, by

the instance of this excellent youth, with a sense of the great obstacle which wealth is in the way of the rich, that he could give utterance and relief to the impression only by comparing the difficulty with a physical impossibility. The neglect of the wide difference there is between the language of the contemplative intellect and the language of emotion, strikingly similar as they are in form, has occasioned a world of error in the interpretation of the Scriptures throughout. Doctrines may be deduced from the teachings of Jesus, but he did not formally enunciate them. He gave the world no creed.

It may be said that he taught for doctrines the parental character of the Supreme Being, and the fraternal relationship of man to man. But neither these truths, nor the great idea of the immortality of the soul, which is accounted peculiarly a doctrine of Christianity, can be said to be new. These truths enter more or less fully into all religions. There could not be such a thing as a religion without them. Jesus was not the first to call God Father, or to assert the obligations of brotherly love, or to refer to a life beyond the grave. These are things that have always been more or less familiar to the minds of men. The Golden Rule, which bids us do to others as we would that they should do

to us, is considered peculiar to Christianity ; and yet it may be found in a moral treatise of Isocrates, four hundred years before Christ.¹

At any rate, Jesus never made any formal statements of truth. Never was there anything more informal than his teaching. He spoke as he was prompted by the spirit within at the moment. He propounded no theology. He did not speculate. He affirmed, or rather took for granted. He was no logician. His utterances, — what are they often but mere breathings of indisputable truth, pure, interjectional, unstudied outbursts ! Such, for example, seem to me to be the ever-memorable beatitudes, which, literally translated, are : “ Happy the poor in spirit ! Happy they that mourn ! Happy the merciful ! ” and so on. And as often almost he put what he was moved to say in the interrogative, the most emphatic form of affirmation ; as, for instance, “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more,” etc.² In fine, as I read the record of his sayings, I see nowhere a cold intellect deliberately framing formal propositions, constructing a body of divinity or a system of moral philosophy, but

¹ See Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, note to Ch. LIV., where the passage in Isocrates is quoted.

² Luke xii. 57 ; xi. 11 – 13. Matt. vi. 25 – 31 ; xii. 11, 12.

a large, beating heart, from which burst forth thoughts that breathe with the life, and words that burn with the fire of God.

Once more then comes the question, In what respect was the teaching of the Nazarene original?

To my mind, the Christianity of Christ was, and still is, a novelty in one particular, and in one particular it is of unapproached originality. It does what no other religion has ever done, and what is the proof of the profoundest wisdom, and of a clearness of insight without precedent or parallel, — in one word, it distinguishes. It distinguishes the essential from the accidental, the lasting from the temporary,

“The primal truths that shine aloft like stars”

from the earth-born exhalations which, seeming to be at the same elevation and to shine with the same brightness, are continually mistaken for heavenly lights, but are only earth-born exhalations still. The things which it emphasizes with commanding force, so far from being new, are the oldest of truths, before the mountains, or even the earth was, from eternity, more or less discerned by all men. His teaching is the articulate voice of the native sense of truth in the soul, which every human being, because he is a human being, is, upon countless occasions,

prompted more or less imperfectly to obey. We should cease to exist were it otherwise, were it not for the obedience which men yield, most often without being any more aware of it than they are of their breathing, to the laws of social and personal duty written in our being from the first. Upon these rest human society and human life. They are more vital than air or light. All religions imply them. All religions have acknowledged the obligations of piety towards the invisible powers, and of veracity and charity in the intercourse of man with man. And they cannot help acknowledging them ; for they belong, as I say, to our nature, and their observance is enforced by our natural affections. It is Jesus alone who places them where they rightfully belong, rank first in sacredness and authority, beyond and above everything else, the holy of holies. All other religions, past and present, all the forms which men have compelled Christianity to assume, to this day confound with them things trifling in comparison, to which they attach an equal, most often a greater sanctity, — baptisms, sacraments, liturgies and creeds, sabbaths and churches, feasts and fasts, and all manner of conventionalisms. Out of the artificiality and ceremonial rubbish which have been heaped upon religion, and protected by time and custom

and the mighty force of majorities from the contempt and ridicule of mankind, Jesus gathered the pure, indisputable truth, and this he enforced with unprecedented power. See the Sermon on the Mount, and his precepts and parables, his parables in particular, — pictures of things that are, of the actual facts of human life, — the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Unforgiving Debtor, — simple representations of things that have happened thousands of times over, and that speak to the universal heart of mankind. How striking the contrast between them and the metaphysical dreams and verbal formulas that have been imposed upon the world as religion, between the parable of the Prodigal Son, for instance, and the “Scheme of Salvation,” about which whole libraries have been written!

And what completes the wonder of the teaching of Jesus, and renders its originality still more striking, is, that it was not only the truth of the soul articulated, he was himself the incarnation of it. This religion, pure from the inventions of men, no external formality, but a life, free, cordial, strong, like the shining of the light, like the blowing of the wind, like the burning of the fire, finding the types of its nature and operation in all natural appearances and methods, — this religion he not only spoke, he

breathed. His life was the gospel of it. It was the being of his being. And thus it was expressed in the living God's language (never to become a dead language) of his personal life. And so is he the highest symbol of it that we know, a symbol not invented by man, but God-created, and therefore always new and of inexhaustible significance.

And for the reason that the truth was his life, his sayings, which, taken to the letter, apart from him, shrivel up at once into trite abstractions, commonplace generalities, have gone abroad sounding through the ages, a living voice, the Eternal Word, forever. Who does not know how the merest truisms, the homeliest forms of human speech, when spoken at great critical hours, not as hearsays, but from the fresh inspiration of personal faith, come like words of command direct from heaven, marshalling nations and changing the course of human history. Then are they battles, victories, thunderbolts. In this way it was that Jesus spoke as never man spoke.

Not in any degree was he bound by any dead forms of tradition or authority, but the fresh offspring of nature, all aglow with the same life that breathes in the free air, untrammelled by false scruples or superstitious fear, a confiding

God's child, in loving unity with the soul of all goodness. How impressively is it shown in what a lofty sphere of spiritual liberty he had his being, when, in direct contradiction of the popular religious faith, and indeed of the idolized letter of the ancient Scripture,¹ he returned, to the outcry that was raised against him for discharging offices of humanity on the Sabbath, that great answer: "My Father worketh always, and so do I"!

So perverted was the sense of truth in his countrymen,—it seemed, were such a thing possible, as if it were wellnigh lost out of their nature,—that they knew not what to make of his transparent truthfulness. They could see no good in him, in whom good alone was visible; at least the leading men of the day could not. To them his acts partook of sacrilege, his words were blasphemous. He who had his being in harmony with all nature, in true relations to God and man, was looked upon with horror, as a profane person, not fit to live. But it was as impossible to extinguish his light as the sun's. It shone forth with redoubled splendor from the manner of his dying. But so much did that self-renunciation exceed in moral greatness anything that had ever before been witnessed, that

¹ Genesis ii. 2.

to this hour, the world, depraved and sophisticated as it is, is at a loss to understand it. The most extravagant theories are maintained in explanation of it.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding all misrepresentations, not only of his death, but of his whole being, the truth, which he spoke and which he was, has gone abroad like the light. The greatest errors in thought and in practice that have gathered round it, however fanatically cherished, have never been able to destroy or to neutralize it. It has steadily and insensibly wrought to soften barbarous customs, to liberate and stimulate the mind, and to humanize our race. And it still is, as it was at the first, a strong vital element, never to be lost out of the world any more than the oxygen from the atmosphere; working oftenest 'without observation,' and most actively, it may be, outside the organizations which bear its name, and in which it is popularly thought to be specially present.

For the ages before Christ, fleeting forms of speech and thought were confounded with the eternal verities of nature, the latter being accounted of no religious worth, the former magnified as the special sanctities of the universe. To such an extent has this error always prevailed, so entirely has religion been separated

from what is, and made a thing by itself, in no vital relation to life, that there has almost everywhere existed a class, who, supposing religion to be what it is represented, have looked upon it as all pure folly and superstition, fit only to amuse the simple and keep in awe the weak, — a morbid affection of the mind which wise men will do well to guard against. Strange that thoughtful men should so regard religion! But not more strange than that it should be made the childish weakness that its friends have so often represented it to be. While with large numbers it is little else than the observance of days and places and words, how rarely does it receive the cordial homage of educated men! How much of the deference paid by this class to this greatest of human interests is prompted by a habit of conformity, fallen into for the sake of avoiding the ill-repute of dissent and the annoyance of opposition! But is it any wonder that religion fails to command the hearty respect of intelligent men, when it is only a barren and perhaps irrational speculation and an irksome formality?

In the time of Christ, the substitution of human inventions for the eternal laws of the soul was carried to a great extreme. To support the sacerdotal order and the temple, the

actors and the sphere of what his countrymen practised as their religion, they were scrupulous in paying a tenth of the value of all that they possessed, even of the cheapest herbs which they chanced to have in their houses for culinary purposes, while eternal justice and the love of the Highest were passed by. Their pious minds were shocked when any one sat down to eat without first washing his hands, which was one of the sacred duties which their fathers had invented ; but they felt no compunction in absolving a son from the plain duty of taking care of his parents. The most religious among them, their pattern saints, could thirst like ravening beasts for the innocentest blood ever shed on earth, but on no account could they set foot within the judgment-hall of the Roman Procurator, lest they should be defiled by contact with men of another nation ! Who, by the way, that considers these Jewish perversions, can have any difficulty in understanding what the Apostle Paul means when he speaks of ‘not having a righteousness of his own,’ a manufactured religion ?

When we take fully into view the wretched externalities which were substituted for the simple truth then and there among the Jews, and

indeed everywhere; when we observe childish trifling exalted into solemnities, and the holy laws of personal duty despised and attempted to be abrogated altogether, and how this same error prevails to this hour and in this advanced century, — what can exceed in wonder the appearance of that young man, who came no one knew whence, so obscure was his origin, and, an utter stranger to the fear that held the masses of his countrymen spell-bound, with a God-illuminated insight announced the law of simple justice, which the natural sense of right confesses, namely, that every man should do to others as he would have them do to him, not as a thing never before heard of, but as the sovereign law, the truth of truths! When asked why he allowed his disciples to neglect the traditions of the fathers, and omit to wash their hands before eating, mark how he turned upon his questioners with the demand, “Why do you make of no effect the commandment of God by your traditions? God,” he said, “commands men to honor and cherish their parents, but you teach them, if they will consecrate their property to religion, that they shall be free from their filial duty.” Thus disengaging the pure truth of God, the great laws of nature, from the human devices with which they were mixed, or under

which they were buried out of sight, he taught that the true religion is a supreme affection for the Best, and a fraternal love of man. So far was he from teaching anything new and peculiar, that on one occasion, when a man came and put to him the most interesting question that can be asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" he made the man answer the question himself, and sent him away. He never sought any partisans. He did not need any. He disclaimed any right of property in the truth that he taught, declaring that it was not his. His it was only as he was its. By thus making it his, he made it all men's. Incarnated in him, it is put within reach, not only of the reason, but of the natural affections, the instinctive sympathies of all men. He has made it the common property of the nature common to him and to all.

When I say that he put no forms on a level with the spirit, I do not forget that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are considered to rest on his authority. But Baptism, be it remembered, was in use before his time. And we are expressly told that he never baptized any one. Nor did he ever allude to the rite but once, and that was just at the last;¹ and then the whole tenor of

¹ Single words and passages are never to be insisted upon in opposition to the pervading spirit of a book. This is a rule es-

his previous teaching forbids us to suppose that he intended to lay any stress upon the form, and authorizes us to believe that he used the sign for the thing signified. But it may even be doubted whether, in the passages referred to,¹ there be any direct reference to the formality of baptism, as the original word, translated *to baptize*, has not primarily or exclusively the formal sense which the English word is used alone to express. Its primary meaning is *to wash, to bathe*. And the direction Jesus gave to his disciples, as recorded in the last chapter of Matthew, may mean simply this: that they were to go forth and bathe all nations, in the spirit of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Be this as it may, there is not a word in his whole history that authorizes us to believe that he instituted the rite of baptism.

And as to the Lord's Supper, there is not a hint in any one of the four Gospels, that, on that last evening, which was an occasion of deep

pecially to be observed in the case of writings like these narratives of the life of Jesus, which make no pretension to verbal accuracy, composed as they are in the careless confidence of truth, as appears in no instance more strikingly than in reference to this very matter of Baptism. In one place John tells us that Jesus abode in a certain town and baptized. Shortly afterwards he tells us that Jesus never baptized any one. Compare John iii. 22 with iv. 2.

¹ Matt. xxviii. 19 and Mark xvi. 16.

emotion, he had any thought of deliberately instituting a positive and initiatory rite. Then it was, that he declared to his disciples that they should be known as such by mutual love, not by any formal observance. That a commemorative institution like our Communion service should have grown out of that occasion, is in the natural course of things. But its character is greatly mistaken, when it is regarded as of primary obligation, positively enjoined. Jesus did not forbid the use of forms, neither did he command it. He instituted no church.¹ There is no ecclesiastical organization that can claim his special authority. He left everything of this kind to take care of itself, as it would and as it must. Churches have grown out of his life,

¹ There are only two passages in which the word *church* occurs among the recorded words of Jesus. Matt. xvi. 18, 19, and xviii. 17. The first of these passages looks very much like an interpolation by some early zealot of the Church of Rome.

By the way, that the Gospels have suffered to any serious extent from interpolations, there is no reason to suppose. There is one way, however, in which a passage may have crept here and there into the text without involving any sinister intention. As, in the carelessness of transcription, a few words may have been occasionally omitted by an individual when making a copy, so a few words written in the margin of a copy by a zealous and devout transcriber may sometimes have been mistaken, by another transcriber using the copy thus written in, for a passage erroneously left out, and so be inserted in the text, the last transcriber having no thought of corrupting the text, but only of restoring it.

and will grow, and their peculiar forms will be shaped by the ever-changing character and exigencies of the times. He never attached to institutions the importance that belongs only to principles.

The teaching of Jesus, in the respect in which I speak of it, in the extraordinary clearness and power with which it distinguishes and emphasizes the essential truth, is hardly less novel now than it was at the first. I would fain believe that these eighteen centuries and more have not past without teaching us to appreciate his wonderful greatness in this particular. And yet, how the undisputed truths which he enjoined as paramount are passed over and belittled, stigmatized with derogatory names, mere morality, politics, and I know not what; while, even in the communities claiming to be the most enlightened, childish theatricalities fill the popular eye and corrupt the conscience, and appropriate to themselves the sanctity of religion! Were Jesus to return and live among us as he lived when he was here, where is the man who would be denounced as a worse infidel and radical than he? What stress is laid on saying prayers! How little is thought of living them! How sensitive are we to the claims of our churches!

How heartless to the sacredness fo Man, the temple not made with hands of the Highest! Just as we are seeing or breathing without a thought of the light and the air, so the omnipresent, ever-active laws of our moral being go unheeded, and we seldom pause to think how they transcend infinitely all the inventions of man.

Would to God we might catch the spirit of Jesus, and learn to discriminate as he discriminated between human traditions and the sacred simplicity of Nature! The difference is illustrated at this great juncture upon the grandest scale; now when our huge ecclesiastical machinery, with its dogmas and forms, has been working for centuries in harmony with the most enormous abuses, and this nation, the most splendid social structure ever reared on earth, is trembling to its foundations, and all men are shaken out of their old habitudes by the simple natural law of equal justice, asserting amidst fire and blood and the ruin of States its rightful supremacy. Behold now how all things vindicate the majesty of the truth which Jesus affirmed to be the greatest. As no one man, so no nation of men is suffered to violate that truth with impunity, — no, not though that nation be never so high advanced. The prestige of its

greatness must vanish like a mist. Its high career must be arrested, although it outshone the pomp of kings. Its myriad homes must be filled with weeping over its dearest blood shed in battle, until the despised rule of equal justice be restored. Thus at this hour, in the eye of the whole world, the Eternal Providence is attesting the truth of the young Man of Nazareth, showing mankind that what was first on his lips and in his life is first also before God and in the everlasting nature of things; that all else, all forms of words and all forms of thought and of worship, are but the toys of a child in comparison. Yes, the words of Jesus, when he said, that to do to others as we would have them do to us is the sum and substance of the service man owes to his Maker, and portrayed, idealized, this first, great law in his own history, — those words are articulated in the fearful uproar of this time, and the divine authority of Jesus is again sealed in blood.





II

HOW THE TRUTH OF HIS HISTORY
IS MADE TO APPEAR





II

HOW THE TRUTH OF HIS HISTORY IS MADE TO APPEAR

IT has been for some time growing clearer and clearer to me that the truth, when it shall be seen as it is in Jesus, will be found to be self-evident, unobjectionable, like the light of day, which no one cavils at or refuses to see by.

And by the truth as it is in Jesus, I mean Christianity considered not merely as a system of moral and religious principles, not as a spirit abstracted from its form, but Christianity as composed of the facts of the life of Jesus as well as of his words. Christianity, thus defined, will, I believe, when it shall be seen as it is, need only to be stated in order to be argued, and commended to the unreserved acceptance of every honest mind.

It is not so yet. The religion of Jesus is far from standing confessed a thing true, and of

course divine, as, being true, it should. There is very little or no discernment of its intrinsic truth. It is cherished for the good that we look for it to do, and not for the absolute good which it is, because it is not seen as it is. And for the last two hundred years, to go no farther back, it has continually met with opposition in the bosom of its own professed communities, and from thoughtful and learned men. And the objections which they have made to it show that their opposition was occasioned by the false representations made of it. They argued, not against the teaching of Jesus, but against the religion of the churches, which is quite a different thing. Ignorance, superstition, and self-interest, claiming to be the special custodians of Christianity, have imposed their account of it upon the world with overbearing dogmatism and terrible denunciations of every whisper of dissent. Is it strange that it should have been taken for granted that Christianity is what its ordained interpreters have given it out to be, and that, being so taken or mistaken, it should meet with such objectors as Lord Herbert of Cherbury,* for example, and other English deists

* One of the earliest English deists. His favorite tract, *De Veritate*, he had much hesitation in publishing. "Being thus doubtful," he says, "in my chamber one fair day in the summer,

of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, — men who have been denounced as scoffing infidels, but who were earnest, truth-seeking men, who, in their day, for truth's sake bore the heavy opprobrium of dissent?

The opposition thus created to Christianity — this infidelity, if so it is to be called — has, by the way, discharged a necessary office in the progress of religious thought. It has done the religion of Jesus no harm. It has helped it, by helping to expose the counterfeits which have usurped its authority, and it has thus opened the way to juster views of it.

The infidelity, or what is regarded as the infi-

my casement being open to the south, the sun shining clear and no wind stirring, I took my book *De Veritate* in my hands, and, kneeling on my knees, devoutly said these words: 'O thou eternal God, Author of this light which now shines upon me, and Giver of all inward illuminations, I do beseech thee, of thine infinite goodness, to pardon a greater request than a sinner ought to make; I am not satisfied enough whether I shall publish this book; if it be for thy glory, I beseech thee, give me some sign from heaven; if not, I shall suppress it.' I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud though yet gentle noise came forth from the heavens (for it was like nothing on earth); which did so cheer and comfort me that I took my petition as granted, and that I had the sign demanded, whereupon also I resolved to print my book. This, how strange soever it may seem, I protest before the eternal God, is true; neither am I any way superstitiously deceived therein; since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the serenest sky that I ever saw, being without all cloud, did, to my thinking, see the place from whence it came." (Leland's *Deistical Writers*.) Lord Herbert was a deist, but no sceptic.

delity of the present day, is, both in its cause and its effect, precisely the same with the infidelity of former times. The reason why not a few thoughtful persons are found now rejecting the New-Testament history, whilst they accept its spirit,—denying or explaining away its facts, whilst they acknowledge its principles,—is the erroneous representation of it common to all existing denominations of Christians, even the most liberal.

That such opposition exists is not to be regretted. For my part, I am glad that it is so boldly made, because the consequence must be what it has always been ; we shall be advanced towards more correct views of the religion of Jesus. We shall abandon ground that provokes opposition, and is untenable, and take a position against which the objections made to the historical truth of Christianity have no force.

Meaning now by Christianity, as I pray the reader to keep in mind, the facts of the life of Jesus as well as his spirit, I consider the opposition which it meets with at the present day from earnest minds to be occasioned by the false representation made of it by all denominations,—namely, the representation of Christ as a being, special and peculiar, in the sense of being essentially different from every other being that ever

existed in the world ; different in his mode of obtaining knowledge of truth and in the whole action of his nature. This speciality is everywhere insisted upon as essential to any worthy pretension to Christian faith.

It is not in the accounts of Jesus that have come down to us, but only in the false philosophy by the light of which these accounts are interpreted, that any authority has been found for this representation of him. In order that it should be proved that he was empowered by God, it is assumed, without one word in the records to justify the assumption, that it was necessary, not merely that God should be seen working with him and through him, (to this statement no exception could be taken,) but that God should appear working with him through a suspension of the established order of things. No otherwise, such is the assumption, could it be certified that Jesus was authorized to announce the Divine will. Only by a direct interposition could the presence of the supernatural with him be manifested, only so could he have any claim to be received as a messenger from heaven, and Christianity to be entitled a divine revelation ; the definition of revelation, as popularly conceived of, involving the idea of interposition, and the supernatural being held to be out

of the bounds of nature ; as if, rightly understood, all nature were not a revelation of the supernatural, and as if all revelation were not natural.

In connection and in concert with this false philosophy thus briefly stated, the dogma of the corruption of human reason has wrought powerfully to cause it to be thought indispensable to the credit of Christianity that it should be shown to be opposed to the natural reason of man.

Accordingly, it is held to be of the first importance to show that all that was said and done by Christ was said and done by him in a manner altogether peculiar, under a so-called miraculous influence, and that he was like no other being that ever wore the human form, differing not only in the way in which every individual differs from all others, but differing from all others essentially.

Now I say that such a representation of him is suicidal. It destroys itself. It is such a representation of him as is impossible to be proved. His history is thus cut off from all the evidence by which alone any fact can ever be established.

If there be anything that is plain, it is that, if a thing is to be seen to be true, it must be seen, or it must be presumed, to be consistent,

not only with itself, but with everything that is known to be true. It must be self-consistent, and it must be all-consistent. The All of being, diversified as it is, is, nevertheless, essentially and throughout, One. All its parts and all its methods, from the greatest to the least, work in unison. It is this characteristic of nature, everywhere more and more apparent the more it is investigated, that affirms the unity of the Supreme Cause. Everything that is, is in keeping with all else that is. Accordingly and obviously, therefore, the decisive evidence of the reality of any alleged fact is its agreement with all established facts. I do not say that its consistency must at once and at all points be made evident. But I do say, that to affirm the non-existence of such consistency is fatal to the truth of the fact proposed, — is, indeed, proof positive that it is a fiction. It is equivalent to saying that it has not the stamp of nature, the signature of God, that it is a counterfeit. If you wish to show a thing to be true, you must show that it is in accord, actually or probably, with all admitted truth. Herein is the demonstration of truth, which approaches completeness only as this harmony is shown.

The need of such a verification of the history of Jesus, the only way possible in which an

unreserved assent to it can be secured, is evidently felt even by those who maintain the most important facts of this history to be departures from the established order of nature. How else but as a confession of this want are we to understand the suggestion, so often made by eminent Christian writers, that the miracles so called of Christ may possibly conform to natural laws not yet discovered, a suggestion, by the way, which hardly an attempt has been made to follow out? In his *Dudleian Lecture*, Dr. Channing, while he understands the miracles to be suspensions of natural order, aims to show that, "instead of warring against, they concur with nature," maintaining that, since the order of nature and these suspensions of it have the same moral purpose, they are in harmony, the one with the other. Bishop Butler, in his well-known work on the *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*, the express aim of which is to bring Christianity into accord with nature, has this remark: "Nor is there any absurdity in supposing that there may be beings in the Universe whose capacity and knowledge and views may be so extensive as that the whole Christian dispensation may to them appear natural, i. e. analogous or conformable to God's dealings with other parts of his creation, as

natural as the visible known course of things is to us."

Thus the mind naturally demands as the condition of its assent, that whatever is alleged as fact shall not violate admitted facts. To make a point, therefore, of representing any proposed truth as in any respect at variance with what is, or as a departure therefrom, is to deprive it of the grounds of credibility upon which alone it can be supported. It is to erase from it the divine mark. It is to render it indistinguishable from the creations of man's ignorant and dreaming fancy.

This is true in all cases, without exception. Most emphatically is it so in regard to the great fact which we name Christianity, because, however it is to be accounted for, Christianity still remains a fact, and beyond all question, a momentous fact, planted now centrally and conspicuously in the heart of the world. Nothing has yet had a more marked influence in the history of mankind. It stands indisputably related to all human things. And therefore, so far as it is true, and is to be seen to be true in itself, it should show itself to be especially marked, marked all over, with that characteristic of all true things, which consists in a perfect harmony, in a blood-relationship, with all nature. In fine,

of all the things that are, there is nothing that should more clearly appear, in and of itself, to be, from its obvious and intimate agreement with all that is, a real fact, than Christianity. The sun in the unclouded heavens should be to our minds an illusion — an optical illusion — in comparison with it, so intimately should its intrinsic truth be felt.

But it is not so seen and felt. There are able and learned men who reject Christianity as all but an unmixed fable. And there is reason to believe that there is a large and not unintelligent class who agree with them, without making any open profession of it. Far-fetched and extravagant theories are proposed, to evade the necessity of admitting the New-Testament history. And numbers there are of those, who accept Christianity historically, who accept it only by the way of inference, i. e. only because they infer that what is so eminent and influential must be true, and not because they have any perception of its intrinsic truth apart from its consequences.

And why is this so? Why, but that this great fact, vitally and harmoniously related to the most interesting facts of human nature and of all nature, is so represented that its natural relationship to all existing things is hidden from

sight, when, being all-related, it ought to be seen, in its form as well as in its spirit, to be of all things the most natural, steeped through and through in the inimitable genius of nature.

Granting what I have no thought of denying, what indeed I do most fully believe, that in the history of Christ we have an account of a new, original, unprecedented development of spiritual force, a new communication of the life of God to the soul of man, it is not on this account released from the necessity of showing that it is in all its details in keeping with what is, that it bears the mark of that accord with nature which is the indispensable voucher of whatever is true. On the contrary, being new, it is all the more important, in order that it may be distinguished from fiction, that it should show such a strong family likeness to nature, that, through the affinity of natural affection, our hearts should leap instinctively to embrace it as our nearest relative, as the unmistakable offspring of the Father of our spirits, of Him who made heaven and earth.

Indeed, so far as the spirit of Christianity is concerned, its moral principles, it is beginning at last to be perceived that the decisive evidence of their truth is their consentaneousness with nature, with such natural facts, for example, as

the laws of right reason, the dictates of conscience, the native sense of the beautiful, and all our good affections. It has become of late a favorite way of thinking, to show how, in respect of its teachings, Christianity is in consonance with nature. One of the best offices discharged by the more liberal forms of our religion is the setting forth of the adaptation of Christian truth to the laws and wants of the soul. The instinct of every true heart has recognized this affinity in all ages of the Church. It has been recognized outside of the Church, by the distinguished Brahmin, Rammohun Roy, for instance, who, forty years ago, published in Calcutta a compilation of the teachings of Jesus, under the title of "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness." And now for some time we are coming clearly to understand that the originality of Christianity, so far as its spirit is concerned, consists in its entire freedom, not only from the irrational and unnatural ideas which have so long been taught as its peculiar doctrines, but from all peculiarities whatsoever; that herein did Jesus show his divine authority: that, with the clearest insight, he discerned the supremacy of the pre-existing native laws of the soul, separating them from the mountains of theatrical fancies under which they were at and

before his time, and have ever since been, buried, and exalting them above all artificial and superficial forms of thought and observance. Yes, we are learning at last to see that Christianity, in its spirit at least, is one with Nature, and that its identity with her is the distinguishing sign of its divinity. Bent as men have been by the passion for the startling upon representing it as opposed to the dictates of man's natural common-sense, they are beginning to perceive its truth, its divinity, in its conformity to natural reason and the teachings of nature. It could not well be otherwise. For, notwithstanding all misrepresentations, so fully do the sayings of Jesus agree with nature, so direct and invariable is their appeal to the soul of man, that one might as well think to cover up the Alleghanies as to hide the spiritual truth as it is in Jesus.

But, while the agreement of his teaching with the nature of things is not only admitted but explicitly affirmed as a signal proof of its divinity, it is not so with the events which constitute the personal history of Christ. These it is still held to be essential to his divine authority to regard in directly the opposite way, as contrary to the course of nature.

And yet the acts of Jesus are inseparably related to his sayings. What are they, indeed,

but his sayings in another form? They are his inner life expressed in action. They are to his truth exactly what the human body is to the human soul, just as vitally connected with it: the natural and indispensable means whereby the spirit, the soul of his religion is shown to be what it is. What can be known of what is in man save through the visible acts by which what is in him is signified? So what idea can we have of the spirit that was in Jesus except by means of the facts of his history? As the soul is in unison with all nature, so is the body in keeping with all natural laws, from the highest to the lowest. In like manner, as the spirit of Jesus was attuned to the music of all the spheres, so the facts, which are the body of his spirit, must be as truly in harmony with all that is. Such is the irresistible presumption. And upon this presumption we must proceed in our inquiries into the truth of his history. As we would ascertain what manner of person he was, and as we would prove Christianity, in its facts as well as in its precepts, to be of God as all nature is, and no invention of man's, we must seek to discover the actual or probable conformity of its history to the order of nature.

I am instantly reminded that the most prominent events in the history of Jesus are strange,

contrary to all previous and to all subsequent experience. I admit that so they appear on the face of them. But what then? Is there no other inference possible than that they must be either fables or miracles, in the popular understanding of the word, i. e. interruptions of the laws of nature? Miracles they certainly are in the primary sense of the term, which is synonymous with wonders. And why may they not be, what I believe that they are, New Facts, simply New Facts? Because they vary from our experience, it does not follow that they are at variance also with the order of nature. Our experience is far from being commensurate with that. With all their singularity, it surely is not impossible that they conform to methods of nature not yet, or only imperfectly, known to us. "To imagine that no system or course of things can be natural but only what we see at present, would be," says Bishop Butler, in his homely way, "a shortness of thought scarce credible." Why, then, may we not base our inquiries into the truth of Christ's history upon the presumption that, so far as it is true, it will be found to be conformable to natural order? Instead of assuming that the facts it narrates are suspensions of natural laws, — an assumption unauthorized in itself, and serving only to render

them incredible, — why not endeavor to find out whether they are not, or may not be conceived to be, in keeping with all that is? thus making them credible, and gaining through them a new insight into the spirit of Jesus, of which, as his acts, they are the illustrations.

I am not advocating the method of the German theologian, Paulus, who undertook to reduce the extraordinary events of the New Testament to ordinary occurrences, assuming the narratives to be mere exaggerations. Whenever this can be done, however, without violating probabilities, let it be done. The interests of truth never require that we should take ordinary events for extraordinary, or, indeed, that we should see anything otherwise than as it is. It is true, it is not impossible that some things in the history may be represented as extraordinary which really were not out of the common course of nature. Not only is it not impossible, but, where extraordinary events did actually occur, it is highly probable, that, in the perturbation of mind which they must have occasioned, some occurrences which were not unusual should have been magnified into marvels. Indeed, in some instances this appears clearly, to my mind, to have been the case. On our guard, therefore, as we should be, against mis-

taking the common for the marvellous, what I am saying now is, that, in respect of those facts of the life of Jesus which cannot be resolved into ordinary events exaggerated, we should do our best to discover what marks they show of conformity to natural laws ; for only so far as they are, or may be presumed to be, in unison with the natural order of things, are they possible to be believed.

Hitherto hardly an attempt has been made to substantiate the history of Christ in this way : by showing that it consists with the truth and nature of things. And why ? There is nothing in the history itself that forbids us to inquire into the facts narrated just as we do into all other facts.

In all other cases we proceed upon the necessary assumption that the facts under examination, if they really be facts, can no more be at variance with any admitted facts than they can be at variance with themselves. So much must be taken for granted, or we cannot stir a step. Is not this presumption implied in the very act of inquiry ? If so essential a principle may be rejected, if an alleged fact may be supposed to be in violation of established facts and yet be a fact, what is to hinder us from supposing that any fiction is a fact, no matter how entirely in-

consistent it may be with known facts? In attempting to confute such a supposition in any given case, you would find yourself instantly under the necessity of appealing to the very principle which you reject. The essential laws of our thinking, the structure of our minds, require us to believe that whatever is is in harmony with everything else that is. In the study of nature, when any new phenomenon presents itself that appears to contradict what we know, we go no further than to call it anomalous. But, in so styling it, we do not mean that it is really without law, but only that we do not know the law to which it is to be referred. It points to some unknown law, and indicates the need of a higher generalization.

There is nothing in the history of Jesus that requires us to depart from this method in our examination of the facts which it narrates. Many and the most important of them are, it is true, extraordinary. At first sight they seem to violate the natural order of things. The presumption, then, must be, in their case as in all other cases, that, if they really be facts, their contradiction of known facts is only in appearance, — that, in truth, they indicate hidden methods of nature, and lift the veil from before a higher philosophy of being.

It is true, the history ascribes these wonderful things directly to God. It declares Jesus of Nazareth to have been "a man approved of God by miracles and signs and wonders that God did by him." But how are we to determine that the works of Jesus were done by God but by discovering in them the inimitable marks of God's workmanship, one of which, obvious and universal, is the observance of an order so comprehensive and so perfect that no one thing interferes with any other thing? Least of all do the lower interfere with the higher, physical laws with spiritual laws. All that he does — that is, all true things — are in harmony. So only are they to be distinguished. That the wonders of Christ's history are ascribed directly to God is no reason, then, why we should not, it is a reason why we should, endeavor to ascertain their conformity to the known works and probable methods of the Divine hand. So only can they be identified as Divine works.

And, besides, neither in the history of Christ, nor anywhere in the Bible, are the wonders that are recorded distinguished, in respect of their origin, from ordinary events. There all things are directly referred to Divine power. The Hebrew writers owned the agency of the Most High alike in the miracles attributed to Moses

and in the hardness of heart which rendered the Egyptian king insensible to them. They recognized no framework of second causes interposed between God and events. If men were wise to understand, "it was given" to them; if they were not wise, "it was not given" them. In the usual and the unusual, the immediate power of God was alike acknowledged. Once more, then, I say, the history of Jesus offers no obstacle to the observance of the same method of inquiry in regard to its contents that we use in the case of all other facts.

The question, then, recurs, What is to prevent us from trying to decipher the signature of God on our great Christian facts?

There is nothing to prevent us but a false philosophy, a mechanical theory of the universe, to which neither the Old Testament nor the New gives any authority, but which has got wrought into the whole fabric of our theology. The fallacy of this theory has been shown by an eminent writer. "The word 'mechanism,'" says Dugald Stewart, "properly expresses a combination of natural powers to produce a certain effect. When such a combination is successful, a machine once set going will sometimes continue to perform its office for a considerable time without requiring the interposition of the artist.

And hence we are led to conclude that the case may perhaps be similar with respect to the universe when once put in motion by the Deity. But the falseness of the analogy appears from this, — that the moving force in every machine is some natural power, such as gravity or elasticity; and therefore the very idea of mechanism presupposes the existence of those active powers, of which it is the professed object of a mechanical theory of the universe to give an explanation.”¹ Misled by this false analogy, the Christian world has assumed that the established order of things is incompetent to the fulfilment of the highest purposes of the Creator, so that it stands between him and us, obstructing the intercourse of man and his Maker. In accordance with this assumption, Christianity, being accepted as a divine communication, is conceived of as breaking through the natural order of the world, and opening a way between the soul and the everlasting Father. And we have come to see little or no value in any view of Christ that does not reveal in him a special interposition. What he taught we hold him to have received in a miraculous way, in a way different from that in which other minds receive

¹ The Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man, Vol. I., Note D.

truth, and that what was done by him was done by a peculiar and immediate co-operation of Divine Power. His history being thus interpreted, he is regarded as a being *sui generis*, with whom, in all essential respects, nothing in reason or nature has any affinity.

But, as I have said, such a being is simply incredible. And it is no wonder that so many intelligent and thoughtful persons seem all but ready to doubt his existence. It is no wonder that he who, when rightly conceived of, becomes our central life, harmonizing for us the whole universe, should have faded away, a dim vision on the confines of our faith, personally scarcely anything more than a name. We may profess to believe, and we may think that we really do believe, in him. But we can know him as an actual existence, nay, as the most real of realities, only as he is seen to be one with the things that are. Notwithstanding the incredible representation that is made of him, people do believe in him in a sense, and they cannot help it, because, as he is true, a reality and no illusion, and as, consequently, he is akin, and by an indestructible affinity, to the mind, which is also a reality, there are obvious points in which, in spite of the distortions of theology and false philosophy, he is felt intuitively to

be, as he is, in harmony with human nature and with all natural things. Still, an intelligent, whole-hearted faith in him is possible only through a distinct perception of his being and action as consistent, or as presumed to be consistent, with acknowledged truth.

Instead, therefore, of assuming what is, on the face of it, derogatory to the Divine perfection, and has no warrant in the Bible, but only a false theory of the universe to support it, — namely, that the world is so made, and such is the providence over it, that truth of the greatest moment could be communicated to mankind only by a method having no likeness to the methods of nature, — I prefer, conformably to all nature and to the soundest principles of thought, to assume, that so cardinal a fact in history, as Christianity by its position and influence shows itself to be, must be a crowning natural product, a product realized, not against, or aside from, but in the established order of things; that, were we competent to pronounce upon the purposes of the Infinite Mind, which we are not, we might say that, so far from his being out of the course of nature, nature culminated in Christ, and that, of all that exists, he is the one being profoundly human, pre-eminently natural.

And this assumption, authorized and enforced

by the whole analogy of things, it is most interesting to see, is justified still more fully when it is put to the test, when we carry it out, treating the history of Jesus as a history which must be in harmony, so far as it is true, with all truth. Accepting these views, adopting the method here recommended of studying this history, we shall find it beginning to grow warm and to throb and stir, as, brought into vital relations to things, it becomes animated with the life that circulates through all that is true, receiving light from all things, even as it gives light to all. And we shall come to know, as we have never known yet, the living quality of Christian Faith.

And then, too, the great new facts of the Life of Jesus, being seen as they are, living and central facts, all-related, will give out light and disclose meanings of which now we do not dream. And instead of having a Christianity misinterpreted by a false material philosophy, we shall have a philosophy illuminated and inspired by a pure Christianity.

When once we begin to understand the Christianity of the Four Gospels, — O how different is it from the religion of the churches and the creeds! — the feeble sense of its truth that we have now will give place to a commanding con-

viction of reality, and we shall just as soon think of doubting the air we breathe as of calling in question the truth of that. It will shine into us with its own light. It will be its own sufficient witness. In its particulars, as in its spirit, it will come home to us with the self-evidence of the Golden Rule. And our inmost consciousness will attest the sublime truth affirmed by Paul: "He, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Yes, from the immortal lineaments of Jesus, made visible in the incidents of his history, and radiant with the Ineffable Light, the veil that now hides them will be lifted, and we shall catch a life-giving vision of the Highest, and perceive the truth of his own words when he said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

O the treasures of the spirit, O the world of moral power still hidden in him, — hidden, not by any confounding mystery of his nature, but by superstition and false philosophy! The wealth of life, with which, by his simple being, he enriches the world, will not be forever locked up against the children of Heaven, wandering and lost in a wide desert full of pitfalls and graves. The voice of the good Shepherd, in full accord

with the voices of life and all the harmonies of creation, will overcome all maddening discords, and fill the air so that the deaf shall hear. In a human shape, taking captive all human sympathies, and appealing through our strong natural affections to the native sense of goodness, he shows us the divine possibilities of our nature actualized. And thus too, as naturally as the grass springs up in the light and heat, we grow in the consciousness of an inner life, which no physical changes can affect. Through Jesus, God, whom a barbarous theology banishes, returns and takes up his abode *in* men, and cleanses and consecrates them, the chosen temples of his perpetual presence. And the Universe, instead of the dead mechanism which it is now held to be, driven by blind forces, thrills and glows again all over and all through, and the mystic's dreams of heaven are here on earth outdone.

The history of the Divine Man will not forever be a sealed book. As in the Apocalypse a volume was brought forth that no one on earth or in heaven could open but only the Lamb, so the life of Jesus shall be opened by Love, of which the Lamb is the symbol. That alone can open it. That alone can open any true word. To that these pages appeal.



III

HIS KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NATURE





III

HIS KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NATURE

WHEN we take up the accounts that have come down to us of Jesus of Nazareth, one fact presents itself, to which no exception can be taken, as it is universally admitted, but to which no justice has yet been done. It is this, that he was indeed and in truth what he appeared, and is, in so many words, declared to be, a man, a veritable man, a real human being. There is no telling to how much in his history this one fact, when it shall be allowed its full weight, will prove to be the key. When we look at him as a man, born into the world as all men are, under the same conditions, with the essential limitations of human nature, a finely organized human being certainly, and extraordinarily endowed, still thoroughly human, having access to the truth which he uttered, to its illumination and

inspiration, in the way and in the only way in which it is open to any : through the consciousness of the soul, through meditation and aspiration and obedience, — when we read his history, with this view of him kept fully before us, it is beautiful to see how it unfolds as in the clear sunlight, and how at once much that otherwise tasks our faith, seeming to conflict with the natural order of things, falls into place with the ease and grace of nature.

In conformity with the method proposed in the foregoing chapter, I propose, taking into view certain qualities or gifts belonging to Jesus as a human being, to show how naturally certain portions of his history result from them. I may be under the necessity of referring repeatedly to the same facts in his life, but I trust that the reader will perceive that the special purpose in each instance justifies the repetition.

In the present chapter I wish to show how much of the history of Jesus is involved in his possession of one natural gift and explained by it, — a gift which was indubitably his in a very high degree, namely, knowledge of human nature. This being duly considered, much that is related of him, that now seems difficult of explanation, is felt to be true of necessity.

As to the fact that he had great knowledge of

human nature, we are told that on a certain occasion, when many persons professed to believe in him, he would not trust them "because," so it is written, "he knew them all, and had no need that any one should tell him what men are, for he knew what was in man."¹ I take these words as a simple statement of the fact that he had a thorough knowledge of human nature. He knew men. There is no necessity for supposing that there was anything out of the course of nature in his knowledge. The Record intimates nothing of the kind. It only states the fact that he had great insight into men. This is a gift by no means uncommon, although it was possessed by Jesus in a very high degree. But even if we had not been told so in the record, we might have known that he understood human nature. His whole history shows it.

What could prove more decisively how well he knew mankind than the comprehensive character of his teachings? Other religions are fitted to human nature in particular conditions, and in the course of time they are outgrown. There are human needs which they cannot supply. But the religion which has sprung from him is suited to men always and everywhere, to high and low, to children and to sages. Let our

¹ John ii. 24, 25, Norton's translation.

nature be never so far advanced, the wisdom of Jesus, the Religion of the New Testament, is still found in advance of it; it still comforts human sorrows, still furnishes incentives to whatever is manlike and Godlike, and even when grossly misunderstood and most unwisely administered, favors human progress as no other religion ever has done. May it not safely be inferred, that the teacher of such a religion knew what is in man, and did not need to be told what men are?

But it is most to our present purpose to note, that he understood human nature as he saw it around him, that he knew his own countrymen and the period at which he lived.

The bare fact of his appearance in public as a teacher shows that he knew the moral condition of the people. He saw their great need of guidance. He felt their spiritual wants. And the first words that he is recorded to have uttered in public, the Beatitudes, show by the graces which they emphasize, that he saw what the moral condition of his countrymen was.

But it is the manner of teaching that he adopted that shows most strikingly how thoroughly he understood them, what a bigoted people they were, how scrupulous about trifles, how heartless where justice and humanity were

concerned. And that he knew this, appears in no way more strikingly than in his manner of teaching. He taught by parables. So frequent was his use of this method of instruction, that his disciples once asked him why he did so. He told them why. And, as it appears, it was because he understood the people. Aware that they would not suffer the plain truth to be spoken, he told them simple stories which presented it in a way that arrested attention, excited imagination and curiosity, set the people thinking what was meant, and made them their own teachers. When he spoke out plainly as he did at Nazareth, it was at the hazard of being allowed no second opportunity of speaking it, into such fits of uncontrollable fury were the people thrown, or rather the respectable, synagogue-going class of the people. And therefore, not on his own account, but that he might insinuate the truth into their narrow minds and enlarge them, he had recourse to those immortal parables. Thus does it appear how well he understood his countrymen.

But the same appears from the whole tenor of his teaching. The description which he gives of the orthodox of his day, — of their zeal for forms and their indifference to principles, of their straining out gnats and swallowing camels,

of their proselyting spirit, — is felt to be true, so entirely accordant is it with human nature, to this hour. All his utterances show how thoroughly he knew the people about him. He read their hearts like a book. He spoke directly to their condition. And the more we learn of their moral state, the more pointed becomes the significance of his words. His own disciples felt that he knew them better than they knew themselves ; as appears incidentally at the last supper, when he told them that one of them was going to betray him. Instead of being offended at such a charge, although eleven of them knew that they had no such thought, they asked, one after another, ‘ Is it I ? ’

His knowledge, thus satisfactorily shown, of the people among whom he lived, being duly allowed for, illuminates his history with a new light, and some things, now summarily disposed of by being pronounced miraculous, are at once seen to be in natural accord with human nature and with his character and position. The account of his baptism, his predictions of his own fate, and his personal character, are all brought out into the light of a more vivid reality.

And first, as to his baptism. Keeping in view his knowledge of the time and place, we

perceive in consequence what an extraordinary force of will it must have called for from him, to take upon himself the perilous office of publishing the truth at such a time and among such a people. That he was a person of a most tender nature, is beyond all question. The whole tenor of his history shows it. While, then, his strong sympathies must have impelled him to quit the seclusion in which he was born, and go to the rescue of his countrymen, he must as naturally have shrunk from the fierce opposition, the danger, and the death, which he could not have helped seeing were to be encountered. He could not have been insensible to them. There is nothing in his history to lead us to regard him as belonging to that class of men who feed on excitement and delight to live in storms. His nature must have disposed him to a peaceful life. While the imagination is baffled, it is irresistibly invited to conceive what it must have cost him to form the high resolve to exchange the retirement in which his first thirty years were passed, for the sufferings and the horrors that would instantly gather round him.

According to the doctrines which have so long had sway, and which hide from us every feature of human nature in him, we are wont to

think of him as moved to act, not, as all other men are, by the impulse of his own mind, but in mechanical obedience to the command of a higher power, signified in some so-called supernatural way, we know not how ; and so he is withdrawn from our understanding and our sympathy. But I am looking at him now as a true fellow-man, made and prompted to act as we all are. And I cannot help trying to portray to myself what must have been his position for days, months, years, before he came out into the world. In the seclusion of a humble sphere, working probably, as the tradition is, at the trade of a carpenter with his father, he saw, with growing sorrow and pity, the degradation of his country, the gross corruption of the ruling classes, the bitter prejudice, the inhuman bigotry and dead, putrescent externality that everywhere passed for religion. He himself, as his whole subsequent history testifies, had perfect knowledge of the truth. He saw eye to eye, — he knew from his own conscious experience that the supreme love of the Highest and the brotherly love of man were, in the nature of things, the perennial springs of life and peace, and that only they whom these affections inspired could be saved from spiritual death. But he knew also that they who gave the law

to the people were so resolved to maintain their power, that whosoever should venture to declare the truth, although moved by the purest sense of truth and using the utmost wisdom, would be sure to excite a hatred that nothing but his instant destruction would satisfy. That so the case stood must have been evident to him from the first dawn of thought in his mind. The more he saw, as he increased in years, of the temper of the ruling class, the orthodox of his day, the more settled must have become his conviction, that no hope of making any impression on them could be cherished by any one who was not prepared to brave their utmost violence. He knew his own purpose. He knew what the people were. And therefore he knew that to publish the truth, at variance as it was with their prejudices and interests, was simply to pronounce his own early and inevitable doom. It was deliberately to pass upon himself a sentence of mortal suffering which every word that he should utter, even because it was true, would go straight to ratify.

What an indescribable force of will, then, was demanded of him to take the first step that was to commit him to so appalling a fate! When one has a purpose at heart involving his very life, and it lies with him to choose the moment

when he shall put that purpose into execution and commit himself to it irrevocably, who can fail to perceive what strength of character, what force of will, must be summoned into action?

Thus it is that the knowledge which Jesus had of his countrymen and of the spirit that ruled them, enabling him to appreciate the cost at which the work he was moved to undertake was to be done, reveals to us the naturalness of that passage of his history, otherwise so difficult of explanation, — his baptism. It shows us how naturally he was moved to begin a career so dark and hard, a career that would admit of no weakness, with the deliberation of a formal self-consecration. Not in mere conformity to a prevailing custom, but because he was moved to fortify himself by taking a position from which there could be no retreating, he availed himself of that public solemnity. Summoning up his whole strength, he lifted up his soul with its mighty burden, abjuring all weakness, to God, using water, the means of outward cleansing and the symbol of inward purification, to express his renunciation of all infirmity of purpose. What a moment was that, when, formally and with the profoundest deliberation, he pledged himself to the most fearful suffering, bound himself to

the cross, or rather, took it up never to lay it down until he was to be suspended upon it! What an era was it in his inmost life! Then was he born into a higher life, and to a diviner power than he had ever before known.

A state of mind is thus disclosed in him unutterably earnest and exalted, and it came to him a revelation from and of the Highest. And it could not be that he could have kept silence in regard to an experience that sounded the very depths of his being. At some time or other, it is natural to suppose, he was moved to speak of it to his friends. Indeed the way in which the story of his baptism is told shows it to be, in every particular, the narration of an extraordinary personal, spiritual experience. The exaltation of such a moment, — how naturally is it described as heaven unveiled! The voice, too, speaking and repeating certain words of the ancient Scripture, — what is this but the usual way in which a sacred passage is represented, suddenly and involuntarily occurring with great vividness to the mind, as texts of Scripture will at moments of intense mental excitement? And in the apparition, “like a dove,” can we not discover the presence of a common dove divested of its ordinary appearance, and transfigured by a rapt imagination into a sign and messenger from heaven?

As the account of the baptism of Jesus is commonly interpreted, nothing more is seen in it than an act of conformity on his part to the custom of the day and the place, and an outward spectacle. Whereas, brief as it is, and outward as it appears, it is the record of an exalted and profoundly intimate religious experience, of a great spiritual birth in the history of the holiest soul that ever dwelt on earth.

As Jesus himself, being a great fact vital to the life of mankind, could no more be hid, no more fail to become known than any other great fact in nature, so his first public act, being what it was, a momentous fact in his spiritual history, and indeed an illustration of the laws of the universal soul, had to be published by the necessity of its nature. We are not told, we do not need to be told, when or under what circumstances it was communicated by him to his disciples. Being the living spiritual event that it was, it could not die. It had, in one way or another, to publish itself.

2. His foreknowledge of his fate. As, by bearing in mind the knowledge which he had of human nature as he saw it around him, we are enabled to discern the naturalness of his baptism and read its significance, so, by the

same reference, we see how it was in the course of things that he should foretell his own death. So far from having any question as to his having predicted what was to befall him, I cannot imagine how it could have been hidden from him; although it is by no means impossible that his prophecies of his death, recorded after the event, may be more minute in the record than they were as they first fell from his lips; and this without any deliberate design of misstating them on the part of the authors of the records.

That he was fully aware of his future appears, however, not so impressively from his direct prophecies of it as in the indirect allusions that he made to it, and which are now all the more significant, because they could not have been understood at the time; as when, for example, he was asked, at an early period in his public career, why he did not require his disciples to fast. So excited were they by the dazzling idea that he was the Messiah, and that the magnificent kingdom was at hand, that, in reply to this question, he said, that the guests at a bridal, with the bridegroom in their midst, might with as much propriety be expected to fast. And then he added, "But the time is coming when the bridegroom will be taken away, and then will be a time for fasting." It is plain to us now,

from these words, what was upon his mind, although no one then could have imagined what he meant.

That he knew that his own life was to be sacrificed appears also from what he required of others. Ever memorable are the words that he turned and addressed to the crowd who were pressing on his steps in excited expectation of the national glory to which they were dreaming that he would lead them : " Let him who really intends to follow me, take his cross and come after me." In other words, Let him account himself as sentenced to die, and, as the condemned were required to do, carrying the cross upon which he is to be hung to the place of execution. So, evidently, he accounted himself.

How strikingly does the answer that he returned to the two brothers, who sought to obtain from him a promise of the two highest places in the kingdom they expected him to establish, disclose his foreknowledge of what awaited him ! " Can you drink of the cup (the cup of death) that I am to drink of, and be baptized with the baptism (of blood) that I am to be baptized with ? " The definition, which he gave upon the same occasion, of true power, when he said that to rule men we must serve them even to the sacrifice of life, reveals the fact, that not

only did he foresee that he was to suffer death, but he saw that he must die in order to give the greatest possible force to the truth which he asserted.

3. His personal character. But what renders it most interesting to consider his extraordinary knowledge of human nature and of his countrymen in particular, is the insight which we thereby obtain into his personal qualities. It shows us that his public career was the career of a man who knew himself all the time to be under sentence of death. All that he said and did was said and done by one who was doomed, and who knew himself to be a doomed man, scarcely ever so much as dreaming of the possibility of avoiding his fate, a man who had deliberately made up his mind, pledged himself publicly, in the most solemn manner, to an early and violent end, and who knew also that every word that he uttered went to seal his destruction. When I pause over this one fact, and mark how he bore himself, with a wisdom unequalled, with that awful future always before him, a future which he voluntarily made for himself, how can I either utter or suppress the sense of greatness created within me!

It is not only from his profound knowledge

of men and of the spirit of his time that we infer his knowledge of what was before him. It appears that he knew his future from his repeated allusions to it, and from the evidence that he occasionally gave of the burden that was laid upon him. "I have a baptism to go through," he once exclaimed, "and how am I agonized till it be over!" As the consummation of his fearful destiny drew near, in the lonely hours of the night, his mental prostration was extreme, and his prayer then was the cry of mortal agony.

Thus let into the terrible secret of his soul, we see how profound must have been the solitude in which he lived. There could not have been a human being that appreciated his position. As he said, no one knew him but God.

And yet he made no secret of his fearful fate. He told his disciples of it again and again, but they would not, they could not, understand him.

In referring repeatedly as he did to his early and certain death, while his main purpose obviously was to prepare his followers for it, yet, when he told them how he was to suffer, it is natural to suppose that it was not without a hope that they might understand him, and have some feeling of sympathy for him. Certain it is that, had they evinced any such feeling for

him, he would have felt it deeply, for he was keenly susceptible to the inspiration of human sympathy. It is true, he was able to sustain himself without it. He did not need the support of any human arm. He found his strength in fellowship with the Highest. In the living, heart-knowledge which he had of the central truth of the world, a spring of inexhaustible power was opened in his being, and he was equal to his solitary position. So far, however, from being raised above human communion, only the stronger and the more refined were his human affections. The exhilarating effect of his conversation with the woman of Samaria shows how alive he was to every intimation of human sympathy. The desire, which he expressed at the last, to live in the loving remembrance of his friends, reveals his sensibility to the solace of their affection. On the last night in the garden how he clung to human fellowship ! He kept his three most intimate friends by him, if any of his friends can with propriety be so designated. They could give him no intelligent sympathy, yet he could not bear to be left alone. When he went apart from them but a stone's throw, he besought them not to go away, but to stay where they were, and watch with him. And as often as he withdrew from them,

he kept coming back to them, and when he found them asleep, and thus showing how little they were aware of what was impending over him, he could not forbear an exclamation of gentle reproach: "Could you not watch with me one hour?" So that, amidst such touching indications of his sensibility, I cannot but think that, when he told his disciples what a future there was before him, had the communication been received by them with any expression of sympathy, it would have soothed him, as I have remarked, not a little. But no syllable of commiseration was he privileged to hear from them. When they wept at the prospect of separation, as they did towards the last, it was on their own account, not his. On one occasion, when he told them that he was to be put to death, one of them repelled the idea in a tone harsh almost to indignation: "Be it far from thee, Lord! This shall not be done unto thee!" exciting his indignation in return. And on all other occasions on which he spoke to them of his death, except the last, they listened to him in ignorant wonder. Believing him to be the Messiah, they could not entertain the idea that so glorious a personage was to suffer shame and death. And since he so often spoke in parables, it was easier for them to suppose,

when he said that he was shortly to die, that he had a meaning which they could not penetrate, than that he could literally mean what he said. So he could receive no sympathy from them. He was driven back upon himself. He must bear the burden alone. There was no one to share it with him. To no mortal eye but his was the black and bloody Cross visible.

Thus, his heart beating full and strong with the tenderest human sensibilities, this wonderful young man pursued his lofty way alone with God, with no present aid or past precedent, through the deep mystery of being. Was there ever anything sublimer than his self-possession? He neither sought to evade the inevitable, nor was he driven to precipitate it. Did one ever before or since bear himself on the brink of so black an abyss with so serene a mind? There is not observable in him the slightest exaggeration or incoherency. Mankind advances only to find every new age illustrating the truth of his words, and rendering his greatness the more wonderful. He was the model for all the world, and for all time, of wisdom simple and profound, and of an unprecedented consideration for others. He was always present, and more than equal to every occasion that arose. He said what the moment offered him the opportunity

of saying, and that so admirably that nothing was left unsaid, and yet so simply and naturally, that what he said seems now a matter of course. Nothing could occur to him, however suddenly and adversely, that he did not so turn it to his service, that Nature and Providence appear to have been in collusion with him, plotting to aggrandize him. He overlooked nothing. He turned everything to his account, the wild-flowers and the birds of the air, everything down to the small grain of mustard-seed, and to homely domestic employments, the making of bread, he made serve his great purposes. In such familiar communion, by the way, as he was with inanimate nature, can it be supposed that he was insensible to human sympathy? And he ended with changing the hateful and barbarous instrument of his death, into the graceful and cherished symbol of the holiest love and hope.

It is wonderfully interesting to observe, that his whole appearance and manner were so expressive of the deepest feeling for his fellow-men, and so entirely must he have had the air of one who had no burden of his own to distract him, that the people flocked to him in great multitudes. Sometimes so eager were they, that some were in danger of being crushed to

death, trampled under foot.¹ At another time, the house in which he was known to be was so beset that there was no getting near the door.² Again, there was such coming and going, that he and his disciples had no time so much as to eat;³ or the people followed him with such pertinacity, that they themselves were ready to faint from hunger and fatigue.⁴ Without doubt the extraordinary interest he inspired was due in part to the idea, spread far and wide among the people, that he would prove to be the Messiah, although there was nothing in his personal appearance to justify the expectation, and he was constantly shocking their prejudices. Then again, the relief that he afforded to the suffering, and in such marvellous ways, by a brief word of his lips and the touch of his hand, had much to do in creating the excitement which he caused. But, after all, the manner of doing a thing always has a very large, if not the largest, share in determining its effect. The greatest act may be spoiled by the way in which it is done, and the homeliest office of kindness may be discharged with a grace that shall hint of heaven. It is not in the form or in the word, but in the spirit that lies the power. And the great per-

¹ Luke xii. i.

² Mark ii. 2.

³ Mark vi. 31.

⁴ Mark viii. 2, 3.

sonal power of Jesus cannot, I conceive, be fully accounted for without bringing distinctly into view what it seldom occurs to us to think of, as it is scarcely once alluded to in the Gospels, and if it were alluded to, was not a thing that admitted of being readily described : his personal presence, in a word, his manner. All that we read in the records in regard to it is, that his teaching was marked by a singular air of authority.¹ No, this was not a thing to be described. It was felt too deeply. It penetrated to that depth in the hearts of men whence no words come, whither no words reach. It was the strong humanity expressed in the whole air of him, and unabstracted by any thought of himself, that drew the crowd around him, or at least fixed them in the attitude of breathless attention. Many a heart, I doubt not, was made to thrill and glow by the intonations of his voice attuned to a divine sincerity, or by the passing expression of his countenance beaming with the truth, which is the presence and power of the Highest. In fine, it was his manner that rendered perfect the expression of his humanity, and gave men assurance of his thorough sincerity. And the peculiar charm of his humanity is, that it bloomed out in this fulness of beauty, not in the

¹ Matt. vii. 29.

sunlight of joy, but under the deep gloom of an early, lonely, and cruel death, ever present to him as the one special thing which he was bound to suffer.

Although he had renounced every private concern and bound himself irrevocably to so terrible a fate, he nevertheless retained the healthiest and most cordial interest in men and things. Life lost not one jot of value in his eyes, although he knew that he had no lot in it but to die in torture, forsaken and defamed. On the contrary, who ever, within so brief a space of time, or indeed in any space of time though extended to the utmost limit of this mortal existence, made so much out of it, or so enhanced its value, as he? With what light and beauty has he transfigured this life of ours! The world had nothing for him but the hideous Cross, and yet he has flooded the world through that Cross with imperishable splendors, unconquerable Faith, and immortal Hope. Notwithstanding the deadly hatred of men, he loved them with a love stronger than death, and put faith in them as no other ever has done. The outcast he treated with a brother's tenderness, identifying himself with the meanest of his fellow-men, and in the most emphatic manner teaching that sympathy withheld from the least

is dishonor cast upon the greatest.¹ Is there anything more thoroughly magnanimous than his faith in the existence of good men and true when he stood before the Roman Procurator, forsaken, mocked, and about to be put to a cruel death? Although not a soul then appeared to speak a word for him, and he might well have doubted whether all truth and fidelity had not fled the earth, his perfect faith in man is shown in that declaration of his, "Every true man hears my voice." That true men there still were, he had no question. Even the treachery and cowardice of those whom he had chosen for his friends could cast no chilling shadow over his unequalled confidence in human nature.

Strikingly as his entire possession of himself and his freedom from all extremes stand out in contrast with his perfect knowledge of his fate, yet, upon reflection, it is evident that it was because of this foreknowledge, because he had renounced all solicitude about himself, that he was so self-possessed, so considerate, and so wise. Being relieved by his self-renunciation from all selfish anxieties, his whole great and generous nature, having God and truth and humanity for its aims, rejoiced in its unfettered liberty.

¹ Matt. xxv. 45.

“Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” is a question that he once asked, as if there were nothing easier than to discern the right. And there is nothing easier, provided only that all self-reference be discarded. Then the right lies plain and broad before us as the day. An arduous labor is it to put self with all its cunning disguises under our feet. But that done, every cloud that obstructs our view vanishes, and we are encompassed with the truth as with the heavens, and it comes as easily to judge for ourselves what is right as to see and breathe. Jesus had renounced self utterly, and all that pertains to it, and consequently his judgments were one with truth, with nature, with God, yes, and his whole being. If you will go back and stand at his side, and not anticipate the future, you will see that never was mortal man placed in circumstances in which it was harder to judge what was right than it was for him; that is, if the slightest regard were paid to self. The truth, which he felt moved to speak, — what a fire did it kindle on the earth! Instead of peace, it brought to him the Cross and to the world the sword. But the confusion that reigned all around him never embarrassed his judgment. Never for a single moment was his vision of the right obscured, because it was

never intercepted by the shadow of a selfish thought. Life was transparent to him, and he walked on to the Cross as to a throne with the grace and majesty of a born king, doing and saying the greatest things as if they were the least, and as one discharges the commonest offices of life. There was no parade, no exaggeration. He saw the truth as we see the light of day, and he obeyed it just as the light obeys it, and the flowers obey it, and the stars.

It is self that kills the spirit within. Alike upon the least occasions and the greatest, it is fatal to the effective and graceful action of our nature. It darkens the eye, impedes our speech, and palsies the hand. It puts all power and dignity beyond our reach. When a man forgets himself, the appearance he is making, all things are at his command, and the highest regains possession of him. Self it is that chains us heavily. When we forget that, the wings of the soul expand instantly, and we rise and join the morning stars and sing with all the sons of God for joy.

This is the truth, of which Jesus is the most beautiful illustration. I used often to think how wonderful it was that, foreseeing the fate that awaited him, and unsustained by human fellowship, he should have been so self-possessed ; as

prompt with the word or the deed for the occasion, however sudden it might be, as if he had been at the pains to prepare himself for it beforehand. It still remains as admirable to me as ever. But now I have a new insight into the reason of it. All concern for himself he had renounced, and therefore nothing remained for him but to be the Godlike being that he was.

He saw the poor, burdened souls around him, and he was moved by compassion, simple, human compassion, which, human as it is, is nevertheless the Everlasting Mercy breathing through our nature, — Jesus was thus moved, and profoundly moved, because he saw as no other saw, how heavy the burdens were that were crushing the souls of men. And he saw also with equal clearness that they had become so perverse that, let him use the utmost tenderness and wisdom, so far from appreciating his interposition in their behalf, they would resent it with the greatest ferocity. They were unable to conceive of so pure a purpose as his, and they would storm and rage against him as their deadliest enemy. He was thirty years of age when he began his office of mercy, very young for so hard a work, and yet not so young but that he must have meditated it for years before he commenced it. We may be perfectly sure that he had not neglected

to follow the counsel which he afterwards gave to others: he had counted the cost; and he saw from the first nothing more clearly, than that, to save his countrymen, he must devote himself to death. His appearance in public showed that he was prepared to pay any price for the privilege of blessing mankind. He held himself beyond possibility of ransom sold to a life of suffering and a violent death. These he accepted as an iron necessity, from which there was no escape.

And therefore it was that he was able to give his whole being to his work, and to neglect no opportunity, however small. He was never intruded upon, never interrupted or delayed by any selfish concern. And therefore all the God-inspired affections of his great nature bloomed out in unprecedented freedom and power.

But what completes the wonder and the beauty of his being is, that, not only did he foresee his fate, and go, without haste or rest, with a royal gait, to meet it, discharging every duty by the way, but, with a depth of insight without parallel before or since, he read the meaning of his terrible destiny. He knew that his death would be his life, that his defeat, utterly disastrous as it would appear, would be his perfect victory. There stands written, among other

things of like purport,¹ that memorable saying of his : " Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit";² words that must have been unintelligible at the time, but which were explained by events. In the familiar mystery of vegetation, he saw a symbol of his fate. As the seed must be buried in the ground and disappear, in order that it may be fruitful, so, as he saw, he must die that his life might have its influence. How grandly has the event justified his wisdom and his faith !

Thus have we in Jesus an all-enlightening revelation of the secret of spiritual power, the law of moral influence, which transcends all physical laws as mind excels matter. We have a hint of it in every man who has given an impulse and a direction to the history of our race. For example. Among the wonders of the world is the people among whom Jesus was born. Through the greatest reverses, conquered again and again, scattered to the four corners of the earth, Israel retains its national existence, as lasting as the monuments of the land whence it was led forth from servitude to power. Is not the root of the vitality of the Hebrew people revealed in the character of its renowned Law-giver ? Refractory as was the material out of

¹ John xiii. 31.

² John xii. 24.

which he constructed the Israelitish nation, is it any wonder that he moulded it to so enduring a form? He threw his whole being into the work. It stands written that on a certain occasion the people, in the temporary absence of Moses, made an idol of gold, which they worshipped. Upon hearing of their idolatry, it is recorded that Moses said unto the Lord: "O this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now if Thou wilt forgive their sin, — and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book that thou hast written!" In these words do we not read the secret of the Jewish national vigor? By the abnegation of self, nations are founded and worlds are saved.

When self is thrust aside, like the great stone rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre of Jesus, then the soul, that holy thing of God, which, though buried, cannot see corruption, comes forth with eyes like lightning and raiment white as snow, and for fear of it, the powers of darkness tremble and become as dead men. When self is renounced, as it was by Jesus, then the divine spirit within is set free, and God speaks, and breathes without obstruction upon the world through the illimitable forces of Faith and Love, and mankind are lifted up out of the depths.



IV

HIS WONDER-WORKING POWER





IV

HIS WONDER-WORKING POWER

WE have seen how, by doing justice to the extraordinary knowledge which Jesus had of human nature, we are enabled to harmonize and reanimate important passages of his history, and obtain a new and satisfactory insight into his personal life.

There is another gift that he possessed, which, being taken in like manner into account, helps still more fully to disclose the naturalness of his personal history : his wonder-working power.

In order, however, to see how this peculiar gift illustrates his personal qualities, we must first be satisfied that he actually had this singular endowment. And of this we cannot fail to be satisfied when once we come clearly to perceive that, singular as it was, it was still thor-

oughly natural, a truly human gift, — human, I mean, in the sense of harmonizing perfectly with all his human faculties.

In regard to this point, his actual possession of an extraordinary power, I observe, in the first place, that, rightly apprehended, there is nothing intrinsically impossible in the fact of his being thus singularly endowed, nor is it one whit more mysterious or inexplicable in itself than the familiar powers that we all possess. That by a simple volition, by a thought of the mind, I can move my hand, is a mystery just as inscrutable as any act of power attributed to Jesus. It indicates the presence within of an unknown power, of which we can give no other account than to say that it is the power of God.

And further, to this power within us, the power of the mind, as we call it, or the will, there is no limit yet ascertained. There are, to be sure, certain bounds within which it is usually exercised. But every now and then there come forth from this central, and as yet unexplored region of Being, demonstrations of power which indicate that here, in what we familiarly term the mind, dwells the highest force that we know, and forbid us to be confident in setting limits to the possible powers of the human will. Volumes might be filled with well-

authenticated cases, in which striking and instantaneous physical effects have been produced by states of the mind, acts of the will. Whatever may be thought of what in our ignorance we term Animal Magnetism, it has at least put beyond question the fact that the limits of the power acting in and through man, through the mind, will, imagination, or whatever it may be called, are not yet ascertained.

There is no intrinsic impossibility, therefore, in supposing that Jesus was naturally possessed of an unprecedented power of will, by which those extraordinary effects attributed to him were produced. It is a supposition that may be made. Whether, in so supposing, we suppose the truth, is a question to be decided only by a thorough examination of this alleged singular power, and of its whole manner of action. If it be a fact, it will prove itself such by its harmony with the nature of Jesus, and with all natural laws. Novel as it is, if it be true, it will show its truth. If, upon examination, it be found to work as Nature always works, in her simple and inimitable style, — if, for example, instead of appearing as a foreign addition to the character of Jesus, as an excrescence and monstrosity, the rude fiction of man, it harmonize with and complete his grand and original personality, — then

the proof is decisive that it is a reality and no fable. For to suppose that a fabrication of the rude love of the marvellous, which it must be, if it be not true, could accord with and finish off a being at once so natural and great as Jesus was, is just as impossible as to conceive that human ingenuity could invent an additional organ for the human body, which should be in perfect harmony with all its other organs, and render it even more symmetrical.

The erroneous ideas, long and widely prevalent, of the miracles of Jesus, ideas having their origin in false theological speculations, have rendered students of the Gospels blind to certain characteristics of his action in producing those remarkable effects, that identify it as the working of nature.

1. In the first place, in no instance of exercising this power is Jesus recorded to have appealed to any agency out of himself. He summoned no invisible preternatural powers. He uttered no adjurations. It was always the direct, brief expression of his personal will by which the wonder wrought was preceded. "I will. Be thou clean." "Stretch forth thine hand." "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!" "Lazarus! come forth!" And so on. On no other occasions did he speak with a more man-

ifest consciousness of his own power. It seems to have been a part of himself, as natural to him as his breath. It was always present in him, always used freely and at will. There was nothing fitful about it, or independent of him.

2. The next thing to be remarked of it, giving it the appearance of a natural power, is, that it did not always accomplish the effect designed at once. The demoniacs were relieved; but the relief was preceded, in many cases, by strong convulsions. Instances occurred in which he was required to exert his power more than once, as in the case of the blind man, who, after the first application of the power of Jesus, saw only dimly, and was able to distinguish men from trees only by their motion. Twice in the case of the demoniac of Gadara does he appear to have exerted his peculiar power before the man was entirely restored to a sound mind.

3. It is worthy of note, that, in relieving the suffering, he invariably addressed himself to the minds of the sufferers, thus working upon the body through the mind. Even in the three cases in which he called the recently dead back to life, he spoke directly to the dead persons. There was no application to the lifeless body.¹

¹ In the instances that appear to contradict this assertion, as when, for example, he restored a blind man to sight by anointing

His power was thus exercised in conformity with what a sound philosophy represents as the conditions of life. Are not the chief springs of animation in the mind? The affections of the mind energize the physical organization. The instinct of self-preservation, fear, veneration, powerfully stimulated, create unlooked-for strength.

4. Another circumstance in regard to the wonderful things done by Jesus, which is entirely overlooked, is, that nowhere in his history is there the faintest hint of any idea or theory of his life and mission requiring that he should be a worker of miracles. We have such a theory concerning him, it is true; but it is a pure theory, taken for granted, and made necessary to support the miracles, in the absence of all sense of their intrinsic truth. There is no statement in the Gospels to authorize it. The fact is, we have not taken the history of Jesus as it is, but we have unconsciously put upon it the construction which our preconceived philosophical and

his eyes with saliva mixed with clay, it is not necessary to suppose that there was any medical virtue in this application. As he could not reach the man's mind and influence him by the power of his eye, he used this means, the simplest at hand, to communicate to the man what he wished to do. It was the language in which he spoke to him, the means by which he made a communication, sufficient for his purpose, between the man and himself.

theological systems suggest and require. It is wonderful how much people thus find in the Bible that is not there. Few persons are there who are not surprised when they learn for the first time that in the account of the Fall, for instance, there is no mention of the devil. In the history of Jesus, until some instance of his extraordinary power is related without comment or explanation, we have no intimation of his being peculiarly gifted, or of any reason why he should be. We are not told that he began with making any claim to a special authority, or that it was necessary to any office with which he was invested that he should be empowered to work miracles. All that we learn from the Gospel of Matthew of his first appearance in public is, that "he went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, publishing the glad news of the kingdom," as John had done before him, "and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And the fame of him went throughout all Syria; and there were brought to him all sick people that were taken with different diseases and torments, *dæmoni*acs and lunatics and paralytics, and he healed them." In the Gospel of Mark no allusion is made to any extraordinary power possessed by him, until we are told of an insane person who

cried out in the synagogue where he was teaching, and whom he restored on the spot to a sound mind. Throughout, the narratives of the miracles are thus wholly unaccompanied by any remark going to explain or justify them. Nothing is said of any other reason for them than the compassion which moved him to work them. We have only the briefest statements of the facts, which renders only the more striking the essential harmony that they show with the character of Jesus. At first view, they stand by themselves, strange, improbable. But upon a closer inspection, they are found to be mixed up with his daily life, making a part of its ordinary incidents, and in keeping with the whole, not disturbing, but increasing, the consistency of the history. Were they interpolations, one cannot help thinking some marks would have appeared of pains taken to weave them in, and give them all the plausibility possible. We should detect the seam sometimes.

5. Observe, further, how the action of the peculiar power of Jesus is marked by the simplicity and directness which are of so natural a character, and by which he was in all things distinguished. In his manner of using it there is nothing constrained or exaggerated. He did not breathe more naturally. Nor are we given

the smallest occasion for supposing that he had any thought but of obeying the impulses of compassion. To us they are miracles of power. To him they were simple offices of humanity, performed with no preliminary show of preparation, with no subsequent self-gratulation. What he did he is represented as doing with the air of one who was doing nothing surprising, nothing that any one could not do. So naturally did it come to him to do those wonderful works, that he does not appear to have understood why others could not do likewise. He told his disciples that they might do the same things, and even greater, if they only believed that they could do them, if they had faith only as a grain of mustard-seed. And how natural was it, as all native power, all genius, is "a secret to itself," that he should have expressed himself in this way, supposing, as I am seeking to show, that his power came naturally to him! What else could he have said? He did what he did because he believed, because he knew, that he could do it; and the belief, the knowledge, came to him just as it came to him to move and to speak. The consciousness of the power inspired the faith. Further than this, all he said was, that it was God working in him. This is all the account that he gave of it. It is all the

account that could be given of it. It was in him, and he knew that it was in him, to use this power. And so full was he of it, so easy and so ready was it, that the gazing, awe-stricken crowds that thronged around him could not disturb his thorough self-possession, nor constrain the native grace of his movements. So far was he above any thought of self-exhibition, he could not be induced by so fair-seeming a motive as the dictate of benevolence even, to exercise his power when there were reasons why he should avoid, for a while, increasing the popular excitement.¹

6. And then, again, what is a very remarkable characteristic of him in the use of his singular power, a characteristic, which the long accepted idea of the miracles as wrought for the purpose of proving his authority has caused to be entirely overlooked, is, that he took no pains to certify his power. With the generous carelessness of Nature herself he evinced no anxiety to convince others of the reality of his peculiar gift. He was far above that. He never exercised any more power than was necessary. When he restored to life the little girl who had just breathed her last, he said she was only asleep, and he dismissed from the chamber every

¹ Mark vii. 24 *et seq.*

one but her parents and two or three of his own friends, summoning no outside witnesses to verify the fact. He did not restore her to full strength, as he would doubtless have been represented as doing, had the story been a fiction. He brought the child to life, and instantly directed food to be given her.

The more carefully we study the accounts of the extraordinary things attributed to him, the more manifest does it become that never was anything done with a more entire indifference to effect, or with less anxiety to guard against misrepresentation. Careless of the construction which might be put on his motives, he did not many mighty works where there was unbelief, and where, of all places, they ought to have been done, had his object in working miracles been what it is commonly supposed to have been, namely, to prove his power and destroy unbelief. So far as I can see, one simple motive prompted him: a pure impulse of humanity. He was, as the history states, moved by compassion. To that was his great power kept wholly subservient. His sole thought was the relief of suffering; and the excitement that he caused neither distracted the singleness of his aim, nor embarrassed the simplicity of his action, nor led him to value himself upon his rare

power. He showed no disposition to take credit to himself. He gave it all, again and again, to the faith which those whom he relieved reposed in him, and by the co-operation of which the effect of his will was rendered so easy and prompt that, unconscious of any exertion, he seemed to himself to have no part in their cure. He told them it was their faith that made them whole. In fine, all is as simple and as far removed as nature itself from an undue self-consciousness or a concern for effects or consequences. It is true he appealed to what he had done as evidence of his truth, as well he might, seeing that it was done with so single a mind and without any self-reference.

Now it is in the consummate harmony of his peculiar power with the purest nature and with his lofty character, that I discern the decisive proof of its reality. It seems, I know, to be investing him with a legendary character, to style him, in a general way, a wonder-worker. But when we consider what the wonders were that he wrought, and the manner in which he wrought them, we can find nothing that either mars the symmetry or belittles the nobleness of his being. On the contrary, it heightens its beauty and finishes it off to a Godlike magnanimity. It is no artificial addition and deformity, but a living part

of him, warm and throbbing with his own life and rounding his personality to a completeness as thoroughly natural as it is divine.

When I am asked, therefore, how I know that he actually was so greatly endowed, how I know that the extraordinary works ascribed to him were really done, my answer is: The power he is represented as possessing bears, in the whole manner of its operation, the inimitable impress of Nature, the signature of the Highest. I know nothing that looks to me more truly natural. I freely admit that, at first sight, it appears to be inconsistent with familiar physical laws. But the more closely I observe its mode of working, the less reason do I find for suspecting that the miracles are deviations from the natural order of things. I am not able to trace their agreement therewith in every particular. But this, I have no doubt, is owing, not to the absence of such agreement, but to the fact that the physical order of things is unknown to me. My acquaintance with that order being as yet very imperfect, I cannot at present see how entirely and at all points the miracles of Jesus fall in with it, and, conforming to it, and carrying it out, contribute to reveal it. But although, in their external form as material facts, I cannot yet demonstrate their

full conformity to physical laws, yet I believe that the time will come when this will be done; and in the mean while they cannot be affirmed to be departures from nature because they do not positively contradict it, but only appear to lack agreement with it, while in their moral import and relations, in their spiritual and most vital aspects, they are in exquisite harmony with the laws of the spirit and with the character of the most exalted person that I know. Thus they are seen to be true because they are true to the highest truth, and the decisive presumption is that they are true to the lowest also. They thus attest themselves.

7. There is one more consideration to which I ask attention, showing as it does how natural and real were the wonders wrought by Jesus. And this is, that, as they are in accordance with him, so are they also in harmony with the circumstances by which they are recorded to have been accompanied. The impression which they are stated to have made, the effects and consequences by which they are said to have been followed, are precisely such as such events should have caused. If they did not take place, then the accounts of them are fables wrought into the story of his life after his death. This, we have seen, they cannot be, because crude and

marvellous fabrications could not be made consistent with so lofty a character as that of Jesus, as we have seen that the miracles are. But further than this: they could not have been so interwoven into the history of his time as not to have betrayed their artificial character by their want of harmony with circumstances contemporaneous and subsequent. As it is, supposing the wonders attributed to him to have taken place, then the impression which it appears, most strikingly because for the most part incidentally, that they made, is precisely what it should have been. What impresses me as especially natural is, that, after the exciting reports of his extraordinary power had once gone abroad, cases should have occurred such as are narrated, of diseased persons, like the Centurion's servant (or son) and the Syro-Phœnician woman's daughter,¹ being suddenly relieved without being brought into immediate communication with him. The first wonderful cures that he wrought were fitted to produce just such an excitement as we gather from the

¹ It is a curious corroboration of the views which are here set forth of the wonder-working gift of Jesus, that the individuals who are represented to have been relieved by him when he was at a distance from them, were relieved through their strong filial sympathies. The centurion's boy was suffering under a nervous disease, and of course peculiarly susceptible of mental

history actually existed, — an excitement in which persons of a nervous temperament or suffering from nervous diseases were naturally affected in the way described; and the people at large were inspired with an extraordinary faith. Insane persons believing themselves, according to the popular belief, to be possessed by evil spirits, or driven insane by this superstition, must have lost all self-control, and cried out when they saw Jesus, as it is related that they did. In fact, the whole country far and wide must have been magnetized by him, — I use this term for want of a better, — thrown into a state in which wonder and faith, “quicken^d by touches of transporting fear,” ruled the hour, and became the medium through which his extraordinary power operated, producing effects that could have taken place under no other conditions. So it should have been, and so it actually was. In a word, the impression produced by the wonderful things ascribed to Jesus, as we gather directly and incidentally from the Gospels, is exactly what it ought to be, if those things were true.

influence. The centurion’s faith, which was so strong as to excite the surprise of Jesus himself, acted so powerfully upon the child, who was bound by strong affection to the centurion, that his restoration must have commenced with the departure of the centurion when he went to meet Jesus. The faith of the Syro-Phœnician woman doubtless acted in like manner upon her daughter.

Holding Jesus to have been thus singularly endowed, and this extraordinary gift to have come as naturally to him as speech or motion, we cannot fail to perceive what extraordinary strength of character it must have required to use so rare and wonderful a gift wisely and well, and what an elevation of mind, what an instance of moral greatness, without precedent, he presents, in that he used this great gift with such wonderful simplicity, and exercised such perfect self-command.

To what a searching test was he put by the conscious possession of a power such as no other was ever conscious of! Fully to appreciate his unrivalled greatness in this respect, we must keep distinctly before our minds the fact that human nature is so constituted that, as we are instinctively moved to the exercise of every native faculty, we are created to take delight therein, and the higher the power we possess, the more profound the pleasure that we have in exercising it. Accordingly, as the singularly endowed nature of Jesus must have created in him a peculiarly profound sense of personal power, the temptation to the self-gratification which the exercise of his power would have given him must have been proportionate thereto. Thus gifted, he was probed to the inmost,

and had there been any selfish weakness in him it would have been detected and exposed. Thus it is that his extraordinary power shows us what manner of person he was, not by its physical effect on others, but by its moral influence on himself. Instead of its mastering him, he mastered it. Instead of leading him astray, it was so used by him as to minister to his spiritual elevation. And he was a young man too, in the full, fresh glow of life, when the soul exults in the consciousness and in the exercise of its powers. We fail to estimate aright the extraordinary trial to which he was thus put, because, as it most satisfactorily appears, he proved himself more than equal to it, almost as insensible to it as if he were unaware of its existence. What would have ruined another, only exalts him to a divine greatness. What would have overwhelmed any other nature, he bore with the ease and majesty of a god, filled with a sense of extraordinary power, which was identified with the consciousness of his existence, and yet crowned with the glory of always using it with perfect naturalness and without the slightest emotion of undue self-elation.

It cannot be said, however, that he was so superior to the trial to which he was exposed

as to be wholly insensible to it. He was tempted to abuse the power of which he was conscious. There stands the record of the temptations that assailed him immediately upon his entrance on his public career, and it is intimated that that was not the only time they assailed him ; they left him then, says one of the Gospels, only "for a season."¹ Their occurrence, however, at that particular juncture, looks as if he were then made aware as never before of his inborn power. I cannot presume to say when a sense of it first awoke in him. Certain it is that we do not come all at once to a full consciousness of the powers we may possess. Indeed, most men live and die without dreaming what is in them ; and our various faculties are revealed to us, so to speak, accidentally. Circumstances discover them to us, and to our own delighted surprise. It is highly probable that some slight incident first disclosed to Jesus his possession of a peculiar gift, and on the first occasion of its exercise there was no premeditation. It came to him all at once to exert this power, to do something out of the usual way, and he did it, — just as it comes to a child to step alone for the first time. It takes unusual circumstances, however, to bring us

¹ Luke iv. 13.

fully acquainted with ourselves. It may be, therefore, that it was not until his whole being was so profoundly moved as it was upon the occasion of that solemn self-consecration, his baptism, that Jesus came to a full consciousness of his extraordinary power. Perhaps it was only a dim, semi-consciousness of it that he had previously. But then, then he descended into a before unvisited deep in his own being. The conflict into which he thereupon entered with himself in the wilderness, with hunger and pride and ambition, looks like the struggle — such as attend great transitions, physical and spiritual — by which he rose to a higher sphere and was born into a diviner condition of being. In still growth his first thirty years were passed.¹ Then came the momentous, self-chosen hour when, proceeding to execute his high aim with the single heart of truth's mightiest martyr, he devoted his whole being to God and to man. As we have seen, the divine force of his nature, until then in reserve, was thrown into that self-consecrating act. May it not be surmised that, in the new depth of conscious power, he was made aware of his native gifts as never before? Certain it is that then such a new flood of light broke upon him that all heaven seemed opened

¹ Luke ii. 52.

to him, and he seemed to hear a voice addressing him as a beloved son. So exalting was the consciousness of newly-found power, that he could not rest. He could not return to his former life. "Immediately the spirit drove him into the wilderness." And then and there it was that—the exalted state of mind, which at first indisposed him to take food, naturally enough subsiding through long fasting, and the wants of the body becoming importunate—the thought of using the power of which he was conscious to appease his hunger occurred to him. But, come in what form it might, the idea of employing his great gifts for his own purposes was rejected. He could not be led astray, not even when he stood upon a lofty mountain-top, and the world seemed to lie at his feet, and the dazzling vision of universal empire rose before him; although the vehemence with which he repelled the suggestion reveals the strength of the temptation.

How absolute the submission of his personal inclinations to his generous aims was, is seen not only in the fact that he would not use his extraordinary power for himself, but more impressively in his devotion of it to every humane office, marked by a simplicity of manner unalloyed by any appearance of effort or self-

restraint. Herein is the wondrous charm of his character, that, fully conscious all the time of the greatest personal power, he bore himself with a supreme indifference to his own ease and reputation. He never thought of using his power until some appeal to his compassion was made. At all other times it lay unused. The miracle of the miracles that he wrought is the greatness of mind that appears in him through them.

What deepens the sense of greatness which he creates in us is, that, conscious as he must have been of his superiority to all around him, and of the truth of his purpose, he was met by the most malignant opposition, and was as far from being provoked into any questionable way of resisting it as he was from being daunted by it. A young man, he found the aged and the honored, the people of standing, the dignitaries of the nation, fiercely opposed to him. When all around him were holding the national traditions in the profoundest reverence, and their authority was the universal law, I sometimes wonder that his mind never misgave him, — that, when his own family did not know what to make of him, and thought him possessed,¹ and he was denounced

¹ Mark iii. 20, 21. It is interesting to remark that it was the

as a blasphemer, he never gave way to the dread suspicion that he was the victim of a fearful hallucination. But no faltering ever betrayed the presence of such an apprehension. With infinite tenderness of heart, with the deep sensibility which his whole life and teaching imply, he combines a perfectly sound mind. Once, when numbers, shocked at his language, left him, he turned to his disciples with the question, — and there must have been a touch of sadness in the tone in which he asked it, — “And are you going to leave me, too?” And towards the last, as he saw that they also would shortly forsake him, he apparently reinforced himself with the words, “But I am not alone; the Father will be with me.” Neither the bitterest opposition nor the alienation of friends could disturb his self-possession or obscure his grand outlook, or for a moment — or only for a moment, and that was at the very last, when he was gasping in the extreme torture of crucifixion — bring

popular excitement which he caused, not any extravagance attributed to Jesus, that led his friends to imagine that he was “beside himself.” See also Luke viii. 19, where the cause of his mother’s anxiety about him is manifest in the fact that a great crowd had gathered round him. How naturally was she filled with concern for a son who had lived so long in the seclusion of home, and whose gentle nature, which she knew, must have seemed to her to fit him but poorly for those rough public scenes! She thought him out of place in a crowd.

over him the thick darkness in which the soul is sometimes lost. At all other times, — even when, in the silent and lonely midnight hour, he stood on the edge of the abyss of agony into which he was about to be plunged, and he turned, like one distraught, from man to God, and from God to man, and prayed that the deadly cup might pass from him, prayed with an intensity of emotion so deep that the sweat streamed from him at every pore,¹ — even then he is strong in his reliance upon the Supreme Goodness. For the rest, he was as self-sustained as if he had the authority of both present and past to back him, and were cheered at every

¹ "The bloody sweat" is an evident fiction. How could blood have been distinguished in the dark? And if, as I have elsewhere remarked, it had been blood, would it not have been said that the blood started from him "as if it were sweat," and not that the sweat came from him "as if it were blood"? But if it were not blood, whence came the mention of blood? The explanation seems to be this: When Jesus, having previously said to them that "his soul was sick unto death," returned to his three half-slumbering friends from that agony of prayer in which, with eyes dulled with sleep, they had seen him prostrate in intense suffering on the ground, is it not entirely in accordance with truth and nature that, drowsy from fatigue and over-excitement, with minds hovering on the borders of the land of dreams, and half unsettled with undefined terror and the visions of violence and death which his language had suggested, they should, as the sweat dropped heavily from him upon their faces as he bent over them to arouse them, imagine that it was blood? In this mistaking of the sweat for blood, I think I recognize the precipitate temperament of Peter. I suspect that this was his idea of it.

step by demonstrations of human favor. He knows neither hesitation nor hurry. He is neither disheartened nor embittered.

And it is interesting to see that, although the worst aspects of human nature are daily presented to him, ignorance and stupidity and gross hypocrisy and malice, he still keeps faith in men, still respects our nature, as no one ever did before, always taking it for granted that there was that in the world that would respond to his words and warrant them. He never attempted to move men except by the truth, pure from every tinge of personal ill-will, unalloyed by any mortal admixture. When deserted by every friend he had on earth, and a mob was yelling for his blood, so far from doubting the existence of truth among men, he declared himself a king in the consciousness of his power over every true man. When was human nature so honored as by this young man, to whom it was continually manifested in its most despicable forms, and who was conscious all the time of a kingly power, raising him high above all about him! There was no treatment, however barbarous, that he could receive at their hands that could shake his faith in them, or make it less worth his while to sacrifice himself in their behalf. They might assault him with the ferocity of wild

beasts, and with the cunning of devils. He never forgot that they were human still, with the indestructible gifts of reason and conscience. They might destroy him, but they could not blind him to their sacred humanity. They might shock him with their depravity, but they could not betray him into the expression of the slightest personal ill-will. So high does his respect for human nature tower above the strongest temptations to distrust or to despise it, that we lose sight of their existence.

Towards the last especially, so marked is his bearing by a natural dignity, so devoid is he of all appearance of being constrained, that it hardly occurs to us to think what a storm of malignity was beating upon him, what a tumult of brutal passion was raging around him all the while. So instantly does he "purge off the baser fire victorious," that it does not seem to come near him. He stands unmoved by it in the full repose of his great being.

It is precisely such circumstances as he was placed in, when he was seized by his enemies and confronted with all that horror, that test the quality of a man to the core. The spectacle of a man from whom all human supports are withdrawn, and who is compelled to face the dread mystery alone, moves us as nothing else

can, especially when he bears himself with calmness and without fear. Then that which is deepest in our nature, and nearest to the Highest, is revealed in him and in us. So stood the man of Nazareth, amidst a tempest of hate, and under the black shadow, fearless and calm. He asked no mercy. He showed no exasperation. At the first, when they stole upon him, under cover of the night, armed with swords and clubs, as if he were some miserable thief, whom they expected to struggle and resist, a few words expressive of his sense of the indignity with which he was treated escaped him.¹ But from that moment on, to the falsehoods that were rained upon him he presented a silence broken by no incoherent exclamations, but only at intervals by a few calm words of unanswerable force, as, when the High-Priest attempted to make him his own accuser, he said in effect: "My course has been open and before the world. It is not for anything said in private that I stand here. What I have said I have said in public, in the temple, the place of the greatest resort. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I have said. They know." And when, upon so saying, he reduced his judge to a pitiable silence, and was instantly slapped in

¹ Luke xxii. 52, 53.

the face by some brutal partisan of that dignitary, the grossness of the insult, the suddenness of the blow, neither disconcerted nor irritated him. No heat was struck from him; but there came those immortal words, addressed to his aggressor: "If I have said what is false, show that it is so. But if I have spoken the truth, why do you strike me?" It is incidents of this kind that reveal the great quality of the man.

From the ecclesiastical court he was taken to the Roman tribunal. And there, arraigned before the representative of the most august empire then on earth, the young Galilean peasant evinced a self-possession so commanding that it overawed the Procurator, who appears to have been disturbed by the bearing of Jesus as by some inexplicable mystery. The efforts that he made to get rid of his official responsibility show how deeply he was impressed by the appearance of the prisoner. It is no wonder that the silence of Jesus troubled Pilate. "Who and what is this man, who will not utter a syllable to defend himself, or second my evident wish to liberate him?" is a question that Pilate may well be supposed to have asked himself. And when his wife sent word to him to beware how he treated this unknown person, as she had had a remarkable dream about him, occasioned, I sup-

pose, by the rumors that must have reached her of his wonderful career, and the priests said that this Jesus had given himself out to be the Son of God, naturally enough Pilate began to tremble lest here was no ordinary man, and lest the reports of his extraordinary power, which had doubtless reached his ears also, and which the Roman gentleman and free-thinker had probably disregarded as the idle tales of the superstitious vulgar, might, after all, be true.

While to Pilate Jesus was an enigma and a mystery, Jesus appears to have understood his judge thoroughly. He seems at a glance to have pierced the official pomp of the Procurator, and beheld the weak, cowardly man. He saw that he was the tool of the priests, and no show of power or good-will that he could make could for a moment impose upon Jesus, or tempt him to think of leaning on so frail a reed. Although the billows of that baptism, which he had all along foreseen, were surging over him, he would not extend a finger to catch at what he knew was but a straw. He who had always known so well when and what to speak, knew as well when words were of no avail, — when to hold his peace. Not for his life, not when the horrid Cross stood close before him, would he demean himself by wasting a moment in

making pleas or explanations, that he saw could be of no avail. His innocence, he knew, was so luminous, that nothing that could be said could make it any plainer. All that he might have said could have had no effect but to aggravate the guilt of his accusers. That he might have done. He might have laid their murderous malignity bare to the sun. But that, in his invincible magnanimity, he had no thought of doing. The incorrigible malice of the priests, even when it was hurrying him to a horrible death, could not provoke him to breathe a syllable of personal ill-will, or descend to personal altercation, nor could the terrors gathering thick and fast around him bewilder his consciousness of the impregnable strength of his position. In this respect, his bearing shows the sublime greatness of Nature herself, who keeps serenely on in her beneficent courses, heedless of the monstrous misrepresentations of human ignorance and folly.

In the silence of Jesus upon the occasion of his Trial, nothing more appears to have been seen than a verification of the ancient Scripture: "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." But there is a great deal more in it than a lamb-like submission. It


betokens a Godlike greatness of mind, the heroism of perfect truth, that would not descend to parley with a fate, which, whatever might be the disposition or authority of the high official who seemed to hold it at his disposal, was seen to be inevitable. It is observable that Jesus was silent while the priests were preferring their charges against him. Perfectly satisfied that they were resolved upon his destruction, to them and to their accusations he could have nothing to say. And when Pilate, astonished at his silence, asked him if he heard what they were saying, still he opened not his lips. When Pilate himself questioned him, he replied, asking, however, in return, whether Pilate spoke of himself, or were only repeating words put into his mouth by others. But after Pilate, while confessing that he found no fault in him, had caused him to be cruelly scourged, thus showing that he had no respect for any considerations of justice and humanity however plain, — after this glaring evidence of the weakness of the magistrate, Jesus saw that words even of perfectest truth would be lost on him, and refused to speak to him likewise. And when Pilate sought to press him, with a menace of his power, to speak and tell him who he was, Jesus still continued silent as to breathing a word in his own defence. He

spoke, but it was only to tell his questioner that he, Pilate, had no power of his own, that he must be a different man from what he was,¹ before he could decide his fate, and that the chief guilt of the transaction lay with those who had delivered him into his hands.

No more decisive evidence could be given of the greatness of Jesus upon this occasion, than the effect which his appearance and demeanor had upon Pilate. Even if the history had told us nothing directly of the way in which he bore himself upon his trial, and when his infuriated enemies were raving for his immediate crucifixion, we might safely infer, from what is related of the judge, that there must have appeared something extraordinary in the prisoner. A man like Pilate, unprincipled and corrupt, who had no hesitation in setting at liberty a robber and murderer like Barabbas, and who probably despised the whole Jewish nation as a miserable barbarian rabble, would never have made so protracted a resistance to the demands of the Jewish authorities, had he looked upon it as an ordinary case that he was called upon to decide. He tried every means that offered to escape the responsibility of a decision. Shrinking from having a part in the

¹ Such I understand to be the purport of John xix. 11.

death of Jesus, he first sent him to Herod, with the hope, as his subsequent evasions warrant us in suspecting, that that prince would pronounce upon the case. He next tried to induce the Jewish priests to settle it. Then he sought to avail himself of the annual custom of setting at liberty some distinguished criminal. As a last resort, he caused Jesus to be scourged, in the weak hope evidently that this would content his enemies. When he found that all was in vain, he dipped his hands in water, and dashed it off, signifying thereby, as he declared, that he washed his hands of all share in the guilt of shedding the blood of this innocent man. All which shows, not that Jesus had awakened in Pilate any friendly concern, but that Pilate was afraid of him. He did not care what became of Jesus. He was willing that he should be put to death by Herod or the Jews, but he shrunk from the thought of laying hands himself on this inscrutable person. There was something more then in the appearance of the prisoner than an expression of passive resignation, something that shone from his eyes into the corrupt heart of the Procurator and made him quake with an undefined terror, something as terrible in its serene fearlessness as the look of the reigning Cæsar in its fierce suspicion. And that was the ominous



hint which the silent self-possession of Jesus gave of a world of reserved power that might be sprung upon the cowardly Roman, he knew not when or how.

The brutal soldiery, to whom Jesus was given in charge to be executed, hearing that he had pretended to be a king, stripped him of his own clothes, and, in derision of his alleged royal pretensions, put on him an old purple robe and a crown of weeds, and thrust a reed into his hands for a sceptre ; but they could not divest him of the greatness of soul which must command forever the homage of mankind. They only rendered it the more conspicuous and the more venerable. The crown of thorns, the reed, the old purple mantle, the vile cross, instead of putting any shame upon him, — he has transfigured them all into more than regal insignia. Under circumstances that search and try human nature to the utmost, and expose any lurking weakness, the inextinguishable generosity of his mind becomes only the more striking. So profoundly conscious was he of innocence and power, that he seems to have been as incapable of being angry with those around him as with an inferior race. He had only pity for them. To the women in the crowd that followed him to the place of execution, when

he saw their tears he said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, weep for yourselves and your children." In the triumph of the brutal bigotry to which he was falling a victim, he saw a portent of the coming fate of his benighted country. And when they were nailing him to the accursed wood, and his blood was flowing and every nerve quivering under the torture, the exclamation that was wrung from him was no frantic appeal to their humanity, no imprecation of wrath, but the gasping prayer of an infinite pity: "Father! forgive them! They know not what they are doing." When hung and suffering the extreme torture of crucifixion, he showed no forced stoicism, nor came there any unworthy ejaculation from his lips. He caught sight of his mother and his best-loved friend standing a little way off, and amidst the death-agony his heart, with an unheard of self-forgetfulness, yearned towards her with filial solicitude. Once he exclaimed, "I thirst!" And once, but a few moments before he breathed his last, his distress was so severe that he broke forth in the sacred language of one of the ancient psalms: "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

To put to rest forever every thought of his

having been moved by an excessive enthusiasm, we need only point to these last terrible scenes, in which, suddenly and severely tested and probed through and through, he manifests without any appearance of effort or constraint the same unequalled greatness. Every emergency, however unexpected and searching, which human nature could be called to confront, he met as victoriously as if it were the most ordinary incident of life. On all occasions there is conjoined in him the artless freedom of a child with the dignity of the perfect man. It cannot be said that he was never taken by surprise, for he never appears to have been under the necessity of being on his guard. Considerate and wise, he was unconstrained as the light. He lived, moved, and had his being in an exaltation of mind as natural to him as the air he breathed. Renouncing self utterly, he suffered no self-loss. Profoundly in earnest, but without the faintest tinge of fanaticism. Sublime in word and work, but in nothing overstrained. Identified in his own consciousness with the Highest, he manifested the dignity which that consciousness inspired, but no self-elation. Approaching the divine more nearly than any other being, he sympathizes more deeply than any other with humanity in its lowest conditions. And he is

all this, as we have seen, not through an extraordinary felicity of nature alone, but by the pure force of his own intelligent will, being aware all the time of a transcendent power in himself. Is it any wonder, notwithstanding the monstrous errors that have gathered round him, that he has held nations spell-bound to him for centuries, and so moved the human imagination that his person has dilated, in the eyes of men, to superhuman dimensions?

Penetrated and surrounded as this little life of ours is by the immeasurable mystery of Being, liable as we are to be bewildered, misled, lost, Jesus, sharing in our weakness, exposed to the same perils, enveloped in the same darkness, accepted as the guiding light what, at the very best, to the wisest of mankind had ever been only a dim, dreamy speculation. He reduced to actual life the loftiest thoughts. Amidst the multitude of human imaginations he distinguished the essential truths, the sovereign laws of the human soul. In the din and discord of voices he recognized the voice of God. There is no telling the extent to which mankind at large are sustained and led by circumstances. Our way, for the most part, is made for us, and rarely do occasions

come when custom, which shapes us all, is broken up, and we are placed in conditions in which we have no precedents to guide us. More rarely still are such critical occasions met with success. Somewhere in the past a light of authority shines to show us a path which we may follow, or an example appears to inspire us. We move, the creatures of imitation and sympathy, in appointed spheres, in beaten paths. But not so, far otherwise, was it with this wondrous Hebrew youth. There came intuitions to him which no other ever had known with equal clearness; and he chose for himself and followed a manner of life which had no precedent. There was no inspiring human authority at his back. His only light shone through his own soul. Accepting that as the true light and divine, the light of the only living and the true, he followed it as fearlessly and as confidently as a child follows its mother. And the dark grew all light around him; and human life, once so dim and haunted by the spectres of superstition, has become, through the illumination of his being, to all who enter into sympathy with him, the bright dwelling-place and homestead, the heaven, of Infinite Love.

Much as he has been magnified, and although he has been, and still is, worshipped as the very

God, it is nevertheless true that no enlightened and just sense has yet been felt of the personal greatness of this man of men. And the reason of it is because he is so profoundly natural, as sublime as the light, and as simple.





V

HIS CHILDLIKENESS





V

HIS CHILDLIKENESS

WHEN a human being is born into the world, quite a period of time elapses before he comes to a clear consciousness of his own personality. It breaks upon him gradually. It is only through the exercise of the various affections that compose his individual being, and which, it is important to observe, all have their objects out of himself, — it is only through experience of these that the idea of self is formed or unfolded within him. Were he never to use eye, ear, or hand, never to hunger nor thirst nor desire, he never would be made aware of his individual existence. This of course. As, however, he instantly begins to use his senses, there gradually dawns upon him, as the result of the experience of his powers, a sense or apprehension of himself as a distinct individual.

It is observable that, for the most part, children, for a considerable time at the first, speak of themselves in the third person. They take slowly to the use of the first person. That the human being thus exists for a time and exercises his natural powers before he becomes an object to himself, has been shown by Bishop Butler in his Eleventh Sermon, or rather is involved in that sound exposition of human nature, as has been remarked by Sir James Mackintosh, who regards those profound dissertations which Butler "preached in the Chapel of the Rolls, under the name of Sermons," as pouring the first light upon the philosophy of our nature in modern times.¹

It appears then, that, at the first and for a season, this miraculous and richly made nature of ours, with its far-reaching powers, exists,

¹ "Butler shows admirably well that, unless there were principles of action independent of self, there could be no pleasures and no happiness for self-love to watch over. A step further would have led him to perceive that self-love is altogether a secondary formation, the result of the joint operation of reason and habit upon the primary principles. It could not have existed without presupposing original appetites and organic gratifications. . . . Nothing would more tend to root out the old prejudice which treats a regard to self as analogous to a self-evident principle, than the proof that self-love is itself formed from certain original elements, and that a living being long subsists before its appearance." — *A General View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*, &c.

and is active, unconsciously. Then the life of Nature, the spirit of God, breathes through human nature, even through those affections of it which, although obviously selfish in the offices they discharge, do not derive their original strength from any consideration of self. As children are in this state, as yet unshackled by the love or thought of self, and full of the native energy which is the working of God, they give us a glimpse of a condition of being in which man is one with God.¹

But the child is soon lured or driven from the paradise in which the human and the divine are one. As we become conscious of self, self-love takes possession of us, and the current of divine inspiration no longer flows freely through our nature. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," but "daily we travel farther from the East," until "we forget the glories we have known, and the imperial palace whence we came."

Such is the common course, the natural history of human beings. To such power does

¹ A little daughter of a friend of mine, eager to go out and play, and being unwilling to wear a bonnet, was warned that she might take cold and be very sick. "Well," she replied, "I don't care," adding, with an air and tone as if she were disclaiming a manifest absurdity, "*I don't love myself!*" She had no idea of being fond of herself as she was of her mother or sister.

self-love grow, that we learn to believe that self-interest is the only actual, the only possible, spring of human action. We forget that there was ever a time when we were wont to act, not from selfish calculation, but from the vigorous impulses of Nature. We lose remembrance of that first brief period when we looked and listened and ran and leaped and shouted from no concern for self, but in the pure exuberance of life, and any trifle, a feather floating in the air, a sunbeam dancing on the wall, a bubble on the water, took us captive, and we lost ourselves in the activity of our powers, perhaps in the mere power of motion. We lose the memory of that blessed period. And yet,

“ in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea,
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

Some little incident, the scent of a flower or of a book, may suddenly bring over us “a shadowy recollection” of the Eden in which we once dwelt, and our hearts are bathed again for a moment in its fragrance. Or, if we cannot recall our past, if our past years breed in us no benedictions, we have only to observe little chil-

dren, and see how they lose themselves in the pleasure or the employment of the hour, passive recipients of the universal joy that comes pulsing through the currents of their blood, and breaking out with electric flashes in their looks and motions. Self-consciousness, it is true, only too soon usurps the ascendancy; but still it is in the young that we have a vision of the sacred life and freedom of Nature. And, what is more, we sometimes see something of the child's heart surviving far into mature life, and even into old age.

Such is the special characteristic of early childhood. And this it is that is beautifully visible in the whole bearing of Jesus, and is the one matchless charm of his life. He dealt in no hearsays, no insincerities, no conventionalisms, either in word or deed. He was fashioned to that original greatness by no outside influences, hedging his personal liberty, and forming him in the mould of circumstance, but by the life within, moving and having its being in the "unchartered freedom" of Nature. He lived wholly from within, and drew life from its deepest sources, and was alive all through. Out of that interior fulness sprang his Godlike character, God-fashioned. Thus had he heaven

lying all around and within him to the last. His words and his acts, unborrowed, the fresh, warm, breathing growth of his personal life, have an infinite meaning, as all true things have, being divine creations.

How he was wont to lose himself in the concern of the moment, and in the emotion which it awakened, and how true the emotion was, is so remarkable in two instances, that I cannot forbear particular mention of them, although his life throughout is one continued illustration of the quality of which I speak. The first was when, as he was talking to a crowd with great earnestness, some one broke in upon him, telling him that his mother and brothers were there, outside the throng, wanting to speak with him. Alarmed at the excitement that he was causing, they feared, as I elsewhere remark, that he did not know what he was doing, and they wished to induce him to go home with them. Upon being thus suddenly interrupted, he exclaimed: "Who is my mother? And who are my brothers?" It may seem at first sight not at all childlike to forget one's mother. And yet it was because, like a child, he was pouring out his whole heart in what he was saying, that for a moment he forgot everything else, the nearest and most intimate ties of kin-

dred. With what exquisite truth of feeling, by the way, did he instantly correct and explain himself! Pointing to his friends around him, he said: "Behold! my mother and my brothers!" The other occasion was when, writhing in mortal anguish on the barbarous cross, and catching sight of his mother and his best loved friend standing a little way off, he forgot himself, his own extreme agony, in the simple yearning of filial affection, and called out to them in broken accents to be to each other mother and son.¹ He might well be pardoned had he, at that moment of horror, forgotten mother and friend, and been wholly lost to them in himself. On these occasions, he shows most impressively that absence of self-reference, which is one and the same with a childlike unconsciousness. And so was it with him always.

And as to a child, so to Jesus, the spirit within, untrammelled by self-regards, impelling him to turn with a cordial sympathy to all around him, animated the whole external world for him. There was an intimate understanding between him and all things, and he was in

¹ "In broken accents." In the original, the few words addressed by Jesus to his mother and John are interjectional: "Woman! Behold! thy son!" and "Behold! thy mother!" (John xix. 26, 27.)

confiding companionship with all that is. It was not, however, with the fairy creations of a childish fancy, but with immortal ideas, that he peopled the world, and with which he made it all alive and vocal with heavenly voices. The lilies, decorated by the goodness of the invisible Father, were more glorious in his eyes than kings and queens. The smallest seed was a precious symbol in his regard of the vitality of truth. The birds of the air were his heralds of the Eternal Providence. And how strong the child's heart was in him appears from the fact that he was all this with that awful fate ever present before him, and although, as to the dearest purposes of his life, he was all alone in the world.

The childlike spontaneity of Jesus it is the more interesting to note, because it has been entirely hidden from sight. Who has ever thought of finding in his personal character a key to the significance of his words, when he said that, unless a man were like a child, he could not enter the kingdom of heaven; or again, when, taking little children in his arms, he declared that of such is the kingdom of heaven? And, moreover, how could the child's nature be discerned in him, when even his human nature has not been recognized?

And then the idea that he was specially sent into the world to carry out a previously prepared scheme, prevents our perceiving how cordial and voluntary were all his words and deeds. His life is everywhere read under the impression that he always had a purpose ulterior to the immediate occasion, and a certain position to maintain. Thus his active humanity is looked upon, not as the single-hearted human quality that it was, but as a show intended to attest his authority; not as the sincere expression of a sympathetic spirit, but as an argument designed to prove the divinity of his mission. He is not conceived of as speaking always from an irrepressible personal sense of truth, and as recognizing the command of God in the strength of his own convictions. As his history is everywhere read, who ever distinctly images to himself the astonishment, for instance, which he is recorded to have manifested at the extraordinary faith of the Roman centurion, who protested that it was unnecessary that Jesus should come to his house in order that his child should be healed?¹ Who ever thinks of Jesus as unaffectedly taken by surprise? According to the popular idea, he only *seemed* to “marvel” on this occasion, and what he said about the cen-

¹ Matt. viii. 10.

turion's singular confidence was not the natural expression of human wonder, but was said with an eye only to the by-standers, that they might take note of so uncommon a manifestation of faith in a Gentile. And when, upon another occasion, he turned round in the crowd and asked who touched him, what reader ever considers that this question was asked in good faith, and because he really wanted to know? What with the belief that he was God himself, and consequently omniscient, and the notion that he was carrying out a previously formed plan, he is supposed to be always aiming at spiritual effects; and all sense of the native freedom of his speech and action, in a word, of the singleness of his character, is missed. When, at the last, he desired his disciples to cherish him in remembrance, according to popular notions it was not because he was yearning for human love, but because he was studying to promote the spiritual edification of his followers for all time. Thus read, his history has lost, and must lose, all reality.

In truth, according to the plain letter of the record, there never was a dweller on this earth more thoroughly human, more entirely natural, than he. The most touching human emotions constantly found expression in his utterances

and his acts. He wondered. He wept. He was filled with indignation, and poured it forth in burning words. He was exhilarated to ecstasy. He was depressed to agony ; at one time so exalted that heaven was opened to him, or he beheld the great adversary of God and man fall like lightning from heaven, or the harvest-time of the moral world already come ;¹ at another time so cast down, that evil imaginations assailed him, or his soul was overwhelmed with a deadly sorrow.² And the occasions always justified his emotion. Nothing could be more natural under the circumstances. Could we only discharge our minds of the false notions of his nature and office that have so long blurred our vision, that we can see nothing in him, or about him, as it was, we should be penetrated to the inmost soul of us with the mere sense of his reality. Here, we should say, is something real, let what else may be an illusion. We could as easily question our own existence as his.

And when once we come to have any clear discernment of his intrinsic and transcendent personal greatness, wherein, by the way, his essential divinity is revealed, we shall cease to be curious about the saving plans and purposes

¹ Matt. iii. 16. Luke x. 18. John iv. 35.

² Mark xiv. 33, 34.

of the Unfathomable. We shall see that it is enough, amply enough, for all the needs of humanity, that such a life has been. In simply being, being the childlike, manlike, Godlike one that he was,—herein is the immortal service which Jesus has rendered to mankind. He lived, not to organize, which could be only for a time, but to inspire forever.

Lost in revering love of his pure spiritual beauty, we shall then have some personal knowledge of what I mean by his childlikeness, and be set free from that excessive anxiety for our spiritual concerns, which is essentially as self-seeking as if it related to our worldly interests. Indeed, it is more so, since it extends the empire of our selfishness into eternity. This it is which is the bane and the defeat of what we call our religion, which is not cherished as human nature's daily food, but is administered as a bitter or tasteless drug, their instinctive repugnance to it people being induced to overcome only out of selfish concern for their interests hereafter. As that man is physically diseased, wellnigh beyond hope of recovery, who is forever studying the action of his bodily organization, never enjoying his food for thinking how it is going to affect him, so is he spiritually in a diseased condition who is

thinking always of his spiritual health, never heartily relishing anything good, because he is wholly taken up with the thought of the spiritual benefit which he is to derive from it. Are such cases rare? Do they not abound? In things spiritual, how many are there who eat, not because they hunger, or have inviting food set before them, but because, under stress of bribes and threats, they are made to believe it will do them good; whereas, in the irreversible order of nature, we do not crave food, physical or spiritual, because it nourishes us, but it nourishes us because we crave it. Let the appetite, whether of the body or of the soul, be healthy, and health will take care of itself. Full provision is made for that. When we cease from seeking our own, and our hearts are wide open to the communications of Nature and of Life, and especially to the winning power of such a character as that of Jesus, we may clean forget that we have souls to be saved. The stern old saying, that "no man can be saved until he is willing to be damned for the glory of God," expresses a great truth. Not until we thirst for the Eternal Beauty to the exclusion of all self-regards, supremely, can we know its salvation. We can receive no inspiration from Jesus until we revere him for himself. It does not yet

appear what we shall be. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, heart has not dreamed it. But I know that when whatsoever is good and great shall appear, not to the bodily eye, that scans only surfaces, but to the inward sense, that penetrates to the soul of things, we shall be like it, for we shall see it as it is, and, seeing it, we shall desire it, and that desire all things are created to fulfil.

But how, in the name of heaven, can it be otherwise than it is with us, so long as what is taught as religion has no intrinsic loveliness that men should desire it? So long as such representations are made of the Supreme Object of all religion, for instance, as, instead of attracting, repel, so long as religious service is made to consist mainly in a monotonous routine of formal observances, it is impossible that men should be drawn to it by other than selfish motives. You may insist never so strongly that God is to be loved, and we may most earnestly wish to love Him, but it is all to no purpose when he is described, as he most commonly is, as a Being in whom little that is lovely appears, a Being in whom a storm of infinite wrath is slumbering even when he is merciful. Man cannot—he was not created to love what he cannot think to be lovely. Neither can his love be

forced. And the appeals made to his fears only make the matter worse; so that when he is brought, as he easily may be, to profess a love of God which he cannot feel, and even to persuade himself that he is conscious of the divine affection, the central spring of his religion is not a spontaneous, self-forgetting love, but a miserable mingle of selfish hope and selfish fear. The whole character of religion, as popularly conceived of and illustrated, shows that it is so. Is it winning and genial? Or is it not gloomy, constrained, and repellent?

As with the love of God, so also with personal reverence for Jesus,—it has been made wellnigh impossible by false representations of him. In the barbarous systems that have been taught as Christianity, he is described, it is true, as holding a position that commands for him the deepest gratitude, mediating to appease the wrath of Heaven, purchasing with his blood the forgiveness of God's guilty creatures. But then, according to this idea of him, it is for service rendered, for what he has done for us, not for what he was in himself, that he is an object of loving regard. Of what he was in himself scarcely a glimpse has been caught. And how could it be? The old creed affirms him to have been "very God and very man,"

i. e. as truly man as he was truly God. But, naturally enough, in the contemplation of this double-natured being, men have lost sight of the human nature. They have not ventured to dwell upon that, lest they should do wrong to his divinity. And consequently those human qualities of his, which are of all things most intimately akin to the human heart, being the attributes of its own nature, and through which alone, in fact, we come to have any sense of the sacred, the divine, are not appreciated, are not seen. And he can inspire no personal affection. He is not loved for the intrinsic beauty of his life, but only for its results. And men must remain strangers to the moral power that comes and can come only from a cordial appreciation of qualities, the greatest and the loveliest ever witnessed on this earth ; strangers, too, to the true divinity of Jesus, for which they are so zealous, and which can be revealed only through his human nature.

The false views of Christ which, hiding from us the unrivalled greatness of his personal character, have withheld its saving power from the soul, are, with their kindred dogmas, losing their hold upon the imagination. They never had any power over the understanding but to confound it, or over the affections but

to distract them. As the New Testament comes to be read aright, men will outgrow them. And then those distorting mists will disappear, and the idea of the Man of men, altogether venerable and lovely, will shine into their hearts with such clearness, that it will be like his second personal coming for which the world has so often looked. Then the better nature of men, now dormant or mournfully perverted by false ideas of greatness, will awake to a new life. And then, so far from questioning, as some now-a-days are disposed to do, whether the world be not outgrowing Christianity, it will be found that the world has hardly begun to grow up to it. When the beneficent fruits of an enlightened and popular understanding of the great miracle of human history, the personality of Jesus of Nazareth, begin to appear, then it will be time enough to talk about getting in advance of him.

At present, although the gross errors concerning him that have reigned now for centuries are, as I say, losing ground, they still have a powerful influence even upon those who profess to have renounced them. The doctrine of his double nature is rejected by many who still hesitate to accept in full the idea of his thoroughly human nature and all that is involved

therein. It is the mischief of error long and widely prevalent, that it corrupts the symbols of thought, gets possession of human language, and so retains power long after the secret convictions of men have renounced allegiance to it. The affections slowly follow the lead of the intellect. They cling to forms of faith that have become obsolete, to decaying churches, like infants to the breasts of a dead mother. Still they do follow the light in time, and cease to linger behind among doctrines which reason has struck dead. I rest in the confident hope that a day is coming when, unhampered by any theological misrepresentations of Jesus, men will study him as a man, and discover with delighted wonder the entire naturalness of his character, and see what an inspiring illustration he is of the qualities, laws, and Godlike possibilities of our common human nature.

But it is not those alone who come to the history of Jesus with minds disabled by orthodox modes of thought and language, who fail to perceive how he lived, like a child at home, in a high moral sphere, how the broadest truth was native to him as the air he breathed, and shows itself to have been so in numberless and most natural ways. The sceptical school—I

call it so only by way of designation — also miss this characteristic of Jesus, as is shown by writers of this school who attribute to him designs, political or ideal, that are wholly inconsistent with it. Our Theodore Parker thought he saw, amidst “the mythical cloud” in which to his eyes the history of Jesus was wrapt, traces of a political design, cherished by him. And M. Renan, in his *Life of Jesus*, recently published in France, and attracting extraordinary attention there, attempts to explain the character of his great subject by supposing that he was carried away and finally overmastered by a Jewish dream of “the kingdom of heaven,” and by a visionary belief in his Messianic office.

To show how entirely M. Renan draws upon his fancy for authority to support this supposition, it is not necessary to enter upon an extended examination of his remarkable work. At the close of his nineteenth chapter he refers, in illustration of his notion that Jesus was from a certain period no longer free but was the victim of his *rôle*, to some twenty passages in the Gospels, not one of which, rightly understood, gives any color of authority to the inferences which M. Renan draws from it. For instance, M. Renan suggests that Jesus appears

to have conceived the idea of making his enemies kill him, and in support of this suggestion, Matthew xvi. 21, 23,¹ and similar passages, are referred to. One is at a loss to imagine how a biographer of Jesus, who has studied the four Gospels with the care with which M. Renan must be presumed to have studied them, could take any such idea from the predictions of his own fate which Jesus uttered. He told his disciples that he should go to Jerusalem, there at the capital of the nation to declare the truth, of course, and that it would cost him his life. So went Paul afterwards to Jerusalem, knowing that bonds and affliction awaited him there. It required far less knowledge of human nature, and of the ruling classes of his country, than Jesus actually possessed, to foresee his fate. Again, M. Renan refers to one of the grandest sayings of Jesus² as giving ground for the sus-

¹ "From that time Jesus began to give his disciples to understand that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer much from the elders and chief priests and teachers of the Law, and be put to death; and that he should be restored to life on the third day." — *Norton's Translation.*

² "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men have them under their authority. It shall not be thus with you; but he who would be great among you must minister to you, and he who would be chief among you must be servant of all; even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to ransom many." — Mark x. 42-45. *Norton.*

picion that he thought of dooming himself to death as a sacrifice to appease his Father! It is true he speaks in this passage of giving himself to ransom many, but this mode of speaking does not involve the idea that the ransom was to be given to pacify Heaven, and M. Renan virtually confesses as much when he admits, by the way, that this was an idea of later growth. Again, M. Renan says that the *disciples* of Jesus at times thought him insane, and refers to Mark iii. 21, where it is stated that the *relatives* of Jesus, not his disciples, thought him "beside himself," and not, as the passage justifies us in supposing, on account of anything said or done by him, but because of the public excitement that was rising. Again, M. Renan refers to Mark iii. 5 as a passage in which Jesus appears "*rude et bizarre*." It must be a singular idea of him, with which his lofty bearing on the occasion referred to is so little in accord that it is thus characterized. Behold him there in the crowded synagogue. It is the Sabbath. A breathless silence fills the place. There is a man present with a withered hand. Jesus bids the man stand forth. A number of the pious people of the synagogue are watching to see whether he will dare to heal the man and violate the sanctity of the day. They are thirst-

ing for his life. He searches their hearts with the question, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" As if he had said, "Which is violating the Sabbath, I or you?" They are dumb. Could any emotion be more natural and becoming than the feeling that he shows? Shocked at their depravity, he pauses over the crushing blow which he had dealt them, looking round on them with indignation, with wrath, if it please the reader to translate the original word as it is translated everywhere else in the New Testament. His question and his look wither them into silence, but kindle into a fiercer flame the deadly hate in their hearts. That he had read them aright and mortally offended them appears from this, that, after, in his own simple and matchless way, he had healed the man, "they went," as we read, "and took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him." Having learned to their cost how dangerous it was to meddle with him on the ground of religion, they went and plotted with a political party against him.

It would be easy to show how the other passages referred to by this learned writer are misapplied by him. The fact is, a fanciful theory has taken possession of M. Renan, and he is,

as he says of Jesus, "no longer free." He is hurried along by it even as he imagines that Jesus was by the dazzling idea of his Messianic office. Although M. Renan assents Jesus to have been carried away by an enthusiasm that grew frightfully, he is not without a sense of the greatness of Jesus even in the very passages which he adduces in support of the assertion. "The grandeur of his views of the future," he remarks, "was at moments surprising."

It is, however, enough perhaps to say, that there is nothing in the history of Jesus, properly understood, to authorize any theories of the kind to which I have alluded. But how utterly at variance they are with his character and the plain truth of things we may readily see when we once distinctly apprehend the extraordinary reach and keenness of his spiritual insight, and the strength of his conviction of those central and simple moral truths of which he was constantly making the most admirable application, and which were the life of his life.

One, whose moral faith, however strong as a principle of action, is yet defective, partly personal and partly conventional, partly founded on the dead letter of tradition and authority, may easily be supposed to announce principles of which he himself has only a limited compre-

hension, and to be only partially governed by the truth which he utters. His aims may be narrowed by personal ambition. Dreams of political power may render him incoherent, or he may be made dizzy by the visions of the imagination. So rarely is human greatness without a glaring flaw of this sort, that it is scarcely to be wondered at that there should be those who deem it wellnigh impossible that a human being should ever have existed who showed no traces of the common infirmity. It is no matter of surprise that it seems to be taken for granted, that, as great men have always betrayed this selfish alloy, there must be something of it to be discovered in the character of Jesus; as if he could not be seen to be human until, in some radical respect, he is shown to have been very weak. But what becomes of the all-invigorating influence which it is the indefeasible prerogative of moral truth to exercise upon the nature in which it is enthroned, as it so grandly appears to have been in him, if one so plenarily animated by it may be supposed to be the slave of fanciful or political illusions, the victim of an ideal, by which he is saved from being ruined only by death? ¹

To represent Jesus as thus deluded is to say

¹ M. Renan.

that he had but an imperfect sense of the meaning of the truths which he always enunciated and applied with an intuitive intelligence, and a grandeur of breadth of which the history of mankind gives us no equal example. With our feeble moral vision we are slow to appreciate the profound moral insight of Jesus. Nevertheless, there is the Record. Study that, taking good care to separate what he said from the Jewish forms of language, and of thought even, in which it was unavoidably invested, and making allowance for the imperfect medium through which our knowledge of him comes, and you will find nothing more truly wonderful in this wonderful person than the breadth and clearness of his moral sense, and the child-like freedom with which he uttered and actualized its dictates.

Where in the history of Jesus is there given us reason for thinking that he did not comprehend the full import of the pure spiritual precepts which he inculcated? Many and eminent men there have been who have said great things, but who have shown that they had only a half-sense of the extent of their application. We study the life of Jesus, and feel, so thoroughly did he live out to the uttermost the truth which he taught, that it was deeper

and broader in his thought than in his words, deeper and broader in his mind than in any other that has ever existed. The full meaning of his utterances, we are persuaded, is yet to be fathomed. The centuries are toiling after him to verify his words and disclose the matchless greatness of his moral being.

I would not affirm, however, that his moral perceptions were absolutely perfect, that they contracted no alloy from his country or his age, or from the infirmity of human nature. There is no need of any such affirmation. But I do say that, morally, he was so far in advance, not only of his time, but of his race, and that his unrivalled moral greatness becomes so apparent upon a faithful study of his history, that for any one who has appeared since his time, however good and wise, to sit in judgment upon him and impute to him political or visionary motives, is, to say the least, simply flippant. It is easier for a critic to betray his own moral limitations than to discover those of Jesus. Principles, of which we have only an imperfect apprehension, may easily seem to us purely ideal and impracticable, the ravings of enthusiasm. Before any extravagance can be attributed to Jesus, we must be sure that we judge him by no inadequate standard; and he must

be the subject of longer, more careful, and more profoundly reverential study than he has yet received. Hitherto he has been studied only for theological or philosophical purposes, only to establish some incredible theory of his nature and office, or to overthrow some such theory. He must be studied for himself. The more the exquisite moral finish of his being is disclosed to us, the more incongruous will it seem to us to impute to him any narrowness or excess of enthusiasm. Discerning truth with so Godlike a vision, obeying it so filially as he did, he was bound to be the self-poised, symmetrical person that he was, or where is the essential power of truth to make whole and clear and strong?

Jesus appears to us in his history through a very peculiar, an intensely Jewish medium. The difficult thing, the thing that yet remains to be done before we can pronounce with decision upon his limitations, is to separate his personality from the hues cast upon it by his country and his age. Although it is difficult to do this thoroughly, impossible perhaps at present to distinguish what was personal to him from what belonged to the age and place; yet even upon a cursory examination, the line, where the distinction is to be made, in some cases becomes visible.

Consider, for example, the striking passage that tells us of the answer returned by Jesus to Peter's question: "What shall we have therefore, we, who have left all and followed thee?" According to Mark and Luke, Jesus replied: "There is no man that hath left house or parents or brothers or wife or children for the kingdom of God's sake, who will not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." A simple statement of an eternal truth, like all the utterances of Jesus, written in the nature of things: the law of compensation. But Matthew's Gospel reports Jesus to have said in addition, and what a strong Jewish look it has at the very first sight! "Verily I say unto you, That ye who have followed me in the regeneration, when *the Son of Man shall sit on his glorious throne, ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*" Is not this precisely such a construction as Jewish minds, into the very texture of which a picture of the splendid kingdom of the Messiah was wrought, would be apt unconsciously to put upon the promise of compensation made by Jesus, even if it were made only in the simple terms in which it is reported by Mark and Luke? Is it not much more likely that his disciples should

so have understood him, than that he should have made such a promise of twelve thrones? he, before whose grand idea of power, so clearly enunciated and so fully realized in himself, "the princes of the nations and the great who exercise authority" fade away into insignificance.¹

Again. We know that the countrymen of Jesus were looking with intense ardor for a great national revolution which was figured to their minds as the coming of a kingdom to be established with preternatural accompaniments of visible power and pomp. It was this vision that sustained the people under the bitter sense of their degraded national condition. While such was the popular idea, it is wonderful to observe how, in all that he had to say respecting the long looked for God's kingdom, Jesus dwelt exclusively upon its moral features. What to the people at large was a vision of worldly splendor, to him was to be a manifestation of the righteousness of God in the destruction of the Jewish nation, the inevitable approach of which even John the Baptist, with his imperfect insight, foresaw, and in the consequent establishment of a better order of things. Without forcing the interpretation of his language, his pictures of "the kingdom of Heaven"

¹ Matt. xx. 25 - 28.

may be understood as nothing more nor less than representations of the moral government of the world, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. So strikingly is this the case, so impressively in his descriptions of the kingdom does he always emphasize some grand moral fact or law, that if, in some instances, he speaks of the outward features of that kingdom, it is only incidentally, and for the sake of giving increased prominence to its moral characteristics, as in that great passage in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, beginning with the thirty-first verse, where he teaches that sympathy with the least is honor paid to the highest. If he appear to show any trace of sharing in the popular belief, it is much more reasonable to refer such appearances to the Jewish notions of those who have reported what he said, than to suppose that his clear, spiritual sight was blurred by any worldly illusions. It is true, he was believed by his personal disciples, and by all who became his followers through them, to be the promised Founder of the expected empire, and there are passages in which he is reported to have declared himself in that character. And yet, although M. Renan thinks that the idea of his Messiahship drove him almost insane, to my mind the remarkable circumstance is not that

he said so much, but that he said so little about it. He does not appear to me to have claimed to be the Messiah in any Jewish sense of that personage. It is true, in Matthew's Gospel and in Mark's it stands written that, when arraigned before the high-priest, and adjured by that dignitary to declare himself, he solemnly avowed himself to be the Messiah.¹ But how is it to be accounted for that no mention of this avowal is to be found in John's Gospel, which was written, as is therein expressly stated,² to prove that Jesus was the Messiah? The omission is certainly very singular. And the variations in the accounts of this same occasion in the other Gospels are noteworthy. According to Luke, Jesus merely avowed himself to the high-priest to be the Son of God, and said nothing of his coming as the Messiah.

Luminous as his history is, it has its obscurities yet to be cleared up, and this is one of them. Far am I from professing to understand it throughout. I wish only to say here, that it is far more likely that the authors of the brief notices that have come down to us of the life of Jesus, being persons full of the prejudices of the time and country, full of the expectation of "the kingdom," should occasionally have

¹ Matthew xxvi. 64.

² John xx. 31.

misunderstood and misrepresented him, especially as they wrote with the artlessness of children, and apparently with no self-distrust, than that one possessed of such extraordinary clearness and depth of moral insight, as he manifestly was, should have been blinded by any national peculiarity, or carried away by any idiosyncrasy. It is a great deal easier to understand how they may have sometimes missed his meaning, or put upon his words an erroneous construction, than to attribute to him thoughts and aims having no affinity, but positively at variance, with his large utterances and larger character. Until it is ascertained to what extent he was understood or misunderstood, — in fine, until we have learned carefully to distinguish in his history what belongs to him, and what to his biographers, — we should be slow to give entertainment to ideas of him inconsistent with what the whole tenor of the accounts show to have been the essential elements of his being.

The imputation of political or visionary purposes to him is, I say, at war with the intuitive wisdom and perfect single-heartedness that characterize him on so many remarkable occasions. He who has given the world that noble definition of true power, accompanying it with the

fullest illustration in himself,¹—he whose whole being dilated with a sense of royal dignity in the consciousness of being born to be the martyr of truth, and of having the heart of every true man, and that, too, when the horror of a frightful death was clutching at his heart-strings² and he had not a friend on earth to stand by him,—he who saw the special glory of the kingdom of Heaven in the simplicity of childhood,³ and who, under the image of a divine kingdom, has published to mankind the eternal laws of the soul,—can we for one moment imagine that he was ever bewildered by political aspirations? He who beheld the glory of the Highest in a death of violence and shame, penetrating the significance of his own stern fate clothed now in the historic grandeur of centuries, cannot be supposed to have been susceptible of the tinsel attractions of any earthly empire, although the vision of it were arrayed in all the vivid imagery of the ancient Hebrew prophets.⁴ He, the conqueror of the world, turning weakness into power, shame into honor, earth into heaven, pouring out his God-like being with the spontaneity of a child in the purest truth and the sincerest love,—who can think of him as the dupe of a dream!

¹ Matthew xx. 25–28.

³ Luke xviii. 16, 17.

² John xviii. 37.

⁴ John xiii. 31.



VI

THE NATURALNESS OF HIS TEACHINGS





VI

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HIS teachings of Jesus were not abstract nor formal. He had no system nor method apart from the method of Nature. He spoke as he was moved to speak at the moment. So much was this the case with him, that it has been supposed that the so-called Sermon on the Mount, which, of all that he said, approaches most nearly a formal discourse, was not delivered all at once, but is a compilation or summary of his precepts, —unpremeditated effusions, taking their shape from circumstances, and so naturally withal, in a manner so entirely unstudied, that we could as easily doubt the truth of the sayings themselves, as question whether the circumstances really occurred that are recorded to have suggested them. His greatest sayings have all the appearance of having been uttered at inter-

vals and upon different occasions. The parables, for example, of the Good Samaritan and of the Unforgiving Debtor, and of the Prodigal Son, embodying the essential truths, the doctrines, if the reader please so to call them, of Christianity, were suggested by circumstances from which they arose so naturally, and with which they are as vitally connected as a flower is with its plant or as a limb of the body is with the body itself, that they carry, with the evidence of their own truth, the evidence also of the reality of the incidents with which they are thus implicated. Felt to be themselves true, they necessitate the truth of their attendant circumstances. And as his sayings and their occasions are thus naturally connected, both together consort equally naturally with human nature and with all nature.

It has become common of late to separate the spirit of Jesus from the history of Jesus, to exalt the former and treat the latter as a doubtful matter; we hear the spiritual Christ magnified to the disparagement of the historical Christ, as if it were possible to have any right apprehension of what his spirit was except through his history, or as if the divinest spirit ever manifested in the flesh could be signified through a history that is no better than a mere collection

of legends. The spiritual Christ can be learned only through the historical. It is easy enough, I am aware, to make a distinction between these two in our minds, to conceive of the spirit of Jesus apart from the actual incidents of his life. But no such distinction can be made in fact, so thoroughly intermingled and made one are the sayings and the acts of Jesus with the truth and holiness and love which they illustrate.

It is only half the truth to say that this interweaving of the acts and sayings of Jesus with one another and with circumstances is beyond human wit to have invented. Where else is the inimitable texture of reality more distinctly visible?

For a striking and beautiful instance in point, I ask the reader's attention to the passage in the history which is found in two of the Gospels,¹ and in which Jesus is reported to have said, "Ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" Before putting this question, he remarked: "When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower, and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat,

¹ Matt. xvi. 1-3, and Luke xii. 54-57.

and it cometh to pass." And, again, he is recorded to have expressed the same thought with different instances. "When it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather, for the sky is red and lowering." And then it is added in one Gospel, "O ye hypocrites," (or, O ye pretenders,) "ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not the signs of the times?" — and in the other, the last clause is, "But how is it that ye do not discern this time?" Mark the emphasis of the interrogative form of expression here employed, implying, as it does, that then it was a great deal easier to read the signs of the time, the significance of the events that were then transpiring, than it was to tell, from the appearance of the sky, or from the direction of the wind, what the weather was going to be.

Consider next the occasion upon which Jesus is said to have spoken thus. Certain leading persons came to him, and asked him to give them a sign from heaven. Supposing this request to have been made in good faith, we should naturally infer that they who made it were perplexed to know what to think and to do, groping in the dark, and wanting to be directed aright. They wanted an intima-

tion from Heaven to show them their way. But their perplexity was all of their own making. Had they really desired to be directed aright, nothing could have been plainer to them than the true way. Jesus, with his clear insight, saw at a glance that they were not true men. He treated them with no respect. He called them hypocrites to their faces. For it was not possible, at a great hour like that, for any human being, if he were honest, with sense enough to understand the most common signs of the weather, not to see and understand what was then going on. It was impossible, it would have been an insult to human nature, to suppose that these persons could be sincere in asking for heavenly guidance, when there were such pointed signs, such signs of the will of Heaven as men had never before been favored with, — signs far less ambiguous than the familiar indications of the changing weather that appear in the sky; and any one who could read these — and who could not? — might far more easily read those. If a man could not discern the heavenly significance of the events that illustrated that hour, there could only be one reason for it, and that reason must have been in his own perverted will. It must be that he wilfully shut his eyes and refused to

see. Well is Jesus recorded to have "sighed deeply in the spirit" over such incorrigible blindness.¹

Only think what a time that was, and what a sign from heaven was the appearance of Jesus himself, and the wide and deep sensation that he was producing! Here was a young man suddenly emerging from obscurity, with nothing imposing in his surroundings, nothing special in his person to recommend him, and yet startling the whole country with his extraordinary personal power, gathering immense crowds around him from all quarters by the astonishing things he was doing, and by the unprecedented air of authority with which he was publishing truths of the deepest interest. The whole land was kindled into a flame of wonder and of awe. The very dregs of the people, the outcasts, from the pollution of whose touch the pious shrunk with scorn, pressed around him, watching every movement of his, eager to catch every word that fell from his lips, and following him about until they were ready to drop from hunger and fatigue. Such an enthusiasm was he creating, such confidence did he inspire, that, through some mysterious power that was native to him, individuals were instantaneously

¹ Mark viii. 12.

relieved from what were accounted incurable diseases by a brief word from him, by the bare touch of his hand, or only of his clothes. The blind saw again at his bidding, and the lame walked. The deranged mind was restored to soundness, and, in two or three instances, the recently dead came back to life.

Was not the demonstration of so extraordinary a power a flaming sign from Heaven far beyond, in significance, any portent that might have appeared in the sky? What could any mortal man in those days want more to seize his attention, to set him thinking with strange earnestness, to break off from him the imprisoning crust of custom, and cause his whole being to dilate with new and life-giving emotion? It had this effect—the exciting spectacle—upon numbers, and upon a class who might be supposed to be the last to be able to read the signs of the time. The ignorant and the low, odious tax-gatherers and harlots, in whose company no respectable person would be seen, forsook their foul haunts, forgot their evil practices, and went after this strange man to see what he would do, to hear what he had to say. Uncared for, and hardened by loss of character, they nevertheless, or rather on this very account, because they were conscious of

their miserable condition, recognized the manifest sign of the time. To them, in the new and deep interest that he stirred, Jesus was in truth a messenger straight from Heaven. It was as if the finger of God were pointing and beckoning them to a fountain of healing, set flowing in full, rich streams. As readily as when a cloud rose in the west they knew that rain was coming, or as when the wind blew from the south that it would be warm, so the appearance of Jesus betokened to the very instincts of these poor creatures, wandering as in an arid waste, the coming shower of Divine mercy. It was the breath of the Eternal Spirit, spring-like in their wintry desolation, and signifying the benign warmth of a better life.

And yet amidst the full splendor of this most manifest sign from Heaven, when the whole population was heaving and thrilling at its presence, there came these Pharisees and learned men, persons of religious repute, corresponding to the clergy of the present day, and wanted Jesus to give them a sign from God! Where were their hearts? Had they eyes? Were they bereft of their senses, destitute of common discernment? Were they stocks and stones? Who can wonder that he pronounced them on the spot hypocrites, pretending to want

what, as they were not stone-blind and deaf, was blazing before their eyes at every turn and sounding incessantly in their ears! They knew, did they? from the appearance of the sky when it was going to rain or to be clear; but when the blind were restored to sight, and the lame walked, and the poor were flocking in great crowds to listen to the words of instruction, and all men's minds were burning with new thoughts, and the power and presence of Heaven were thus strikingly demonstrated, they were utterly in the dark, and must needs come to Jesus and beg him for some indication from Heaven to show them what they were to think and do. There could be no question of their duplicity. They asked for one thing, and meant another. As they were not so stupid but that they could understand the indications of the weather, if they could not read the far less uncertain signs of the time, there could only be one reason for it. Their blindness was wilful. They did not discern the meaning of what was going on all around them because they would not, verifying the proverb that none are so blind as those who will not see, and the words of Jesus himself, when he said, "You will not come to me that ye may have life."

The case was a plain one. There never was

a plainer. These persons asked for a sign from Heaven ; but if they had really wanted heavenly signs, they would not have needed to ask for them. They were right before their eyes. So depraved were they by conceit of themselves and love of power, that they loathed heavenly things, truth, justice, and a lowly and generous mind. It was not to be thought of for a single instant, that this unlettered carpenter, who was going about presuming to teach the people without paying the slightest deference to their authority, whom nobody knew anything about, and who dared even to speak against them, was wiser than they all, and that, if they were wise, the very best thing they could do was to leave everything and go and sit like little children at his feet. They had not the slightest idea of mortifying the intense bigotry which had grown to be their second nature. They were not to be told that they must forgive their enemies, and hold the Samaritans to be their neighbors, to be loved as they loved themselves. What they went to Jesus for, asking for heavenly direction, Heaven only knew. It was probably in deference, in part, to the imposing demonstrations of popular feeling. And partly, perhaps, their asking him for a sign indicated that they really were, in the smallest degree possible, aware of

the significance of his words and works. If they were wholly unmoved, why did they consult him? It was not in human nature to be utterly insensible to such things as were going on before their eyes. Still, they did what they could to ignore their significance. So far from desiring what they asked, a sign from Heaven, the sign they wanted could come only from an opposite quarter. They were hungry for popularity and power, for vengeance upon their Roman conquerors. The only sign they wanted was a sign which Heaven had not to give: a new assurance that they were Heaven's especial favorites, and that all other nations were what in common speech they styled them, dogs. So besotted were they, they could tell readily enough when it would rain, but they could not understand things of infinitely plainer significance of heavenly wisdom and power, than any appearances in the sky were of the weather.

And how naturally and how strikingly did Jesus disclose his thorough knowledge of these seekers for a sign and of human nature, comparing them, as he did, to persons laboring under the paroxysms of demoniacal possession!¹ By asking for a sign, they manifested some sensibility to the events of the time. By thus

¹ Matthew xii. 43-45.

virtually admitting his influence and authority, they might appear to be forsaken by the evil spirit that possessed them. But the appearance was only momentary. The evil spirit would return with sevenfold violence and find them more prepared for it than ever, and their condition then would be worse than it was before.

This passage in the history is as consistent with human nature as it is with itself. The very same depraved will that appears in those Pharisees has appeared over and over again, and among those who are classed with the foremost in standing and culture. In fact, it is often occasioned by the advantages with which education surrounds men. The pride of position forges heavy chains. They who have attained to any skill in the exercise of their understandings are apt at juggling with them and playing tricks upon themselves and dodging their consciences. They can find or make arguments for whatever they desire to believe; while simple-minded persons, unskilled in such arts, are compelled to yield without evasion or subterfuge to the plain force of truth. They do not know any by-paths whereby they may avoid it. Hence it is that in all ages truth is so often hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes.

I turn to another passage in the history, which, when fairly apprehended, is found so entirely in accord with human nature, and with the position and character of the actors in the scene, that it creates in the mind the liveliest sense of truth.

On a certain occasion, so we read, a young man came running to Jesus, and, kneeling down before him, thus addressed him: "Good Master! what shall I do that I may have eternal life?" There must have been a prepossessing air of ingenuousness in the countenance and voice, in the whole appearance of this youth; for, as it is written in the simple style of the history, Jesus, beholding the young man, loved him. It is natural to suppose that it was the sincere and winning tone of his address that prompted Jesus to repel the title of Good. The disclaimer seems to intimate that he felt the flattery of being so styled by one who spoke with the authority of an honest impulse, and not merely in formal courtesy. In answer to the young man's question, Jesus bade him keep the commandments. He replied, that he had done so from his childhood up. Jesus then told him, that, if he would be perfect, he must dispose of his property,—for he was rich,—give it to the poor, and come and join him. At

first sight, the requisition looks austere. It certainly evinces the disinterestedness of Jesus, his superiority to all mercenary considerations. But in truth it was as wise as it was disinterested. Under the circumstances, what else was there for the youth to do? He could not join Jesus and keep his wealth. His very life would be hazarded. It was a stern alternative by which he was met. Perfection was not to be purchased at any less price than his whole estate. Jesus never concealed from those who would follow him the conditions upon which alone truth was to be served. It was a hard predicament. No cross, no crown. The world's wealth or the soul's, — one or the other was to be given up. There was no escape. And as it proved, and as was natural, those who had the least of the world's goods were most disposed to resign the little they had, and give in their adhesion to the truth; while the wealthy, habituated to the self-indulgence of wealth, were least inclined to the sacrifice. So was it with the young man. He was not equal to the self-denial. He turned away sorrowful. He had come running to Jesus, every feature beaming with the confidence of youth, but he departed with slow step and downcast look, chagrined and regretful.

As he retired, Jesus turned to those around him and exclaimed, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter the heavenly kingdom." The kingdom of Heaven, be it remembered, in the mind of Jesus, was that authority of Truth which no one could acknowledge but at the peril of all that men hold dear in life. How natural and how true the thought to which he thus gave utterance! Since this young man, so blameless and prepossessing, was unable to enter that service which is the kingdom of God in the soul, who was there that was rich who could be expected, and especially at such an hour as that, to make the necessary sacrifice? And in view of so striking an instance of the disabling influence of wealth, how naturally was Jesus prompted to express himself thus strongly! It is the language of one deeply moved. But not to repeat what I have elsewhere said in elucidation of these words,¹ let us note the effect which they had upon his disciples. They were greatly amazed at these exclamations. They knew not what to make of such language. Their astonishment may be readily understood.

¹ See page 9.

According to their way of thinking, the kingdom of Heaven was a visible empire, shortly to be established and abounding in riches. It was the opulent reign of the Messiah. Great, of course, was their surprise to hear him who, they were fondly trusting, was the very person sent by Heaven to introduce the great kingdom, declare that it was impossible for the rich to enter it. They gave utterance to their amazement at this assertion in the exclamation, "Who, then, can be saved?" To be saved, and to enter the kingdom of God, to their minds meant the same thing. Poverty was the very thing from which they were looking most eagerly to be saved. And it is precisely as if they had said, "If rich men cannot enter the kingdom, who can?" At this expression of their wonder, Jesus looked at them, and, as this slight circumstance is mentioned particularly in the narratives, I cannot but think that his look must have been peculiarly impressive. "He beheld them," beheld them with an expression of countenance that gave a force to his meaning, which, in their then ignorant state, no words could convey to them. "With men," said he, "it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." That is, "You cannot conceive how there can be a kingdom of heaven

without rich men in it : it is impossible to you, but it is possible with God." How it was possible could not be told then in any terms which they would have understood. Events alone could explain to them the true nature of the kingdom. Time alone would enable them to understand it. They never did come to understand it fully to the day of their death. They were always looking for a splendid personal appearance of the Messiah, although, as time went on and their experience deepened, the vision gradually faded and grew dim, and they steadily came to be most interested in things infinitely better. So that on this occasion Jesus said all that could be said, all that they were able to understand, in assuring them that it was possible for the kingdom to be, although no rich man should enter it.

But great as his authority was with them, and steadily as their confidence in him was growing, yet on the present occasion they were by no means satisfied. They were following him from personal affection greatly alloyed by selfish expectations ; and if there were no rich men to be admitted into his kingdom, how were their hopes to be realized ? What was to become of them ? One of their number, Peter, always forward to speak for the rest, thinking

it high time to come to an understanding, and unrestrained by the personal reverence which, upon after occasions, when their Master said or did what they could not understand, kept them silent, exclaimed, "What shall we have, then, we who have left all and followed thee?"

And here it was that, under Jewish forms of expression and of thought, Jesus gave utterance to one of the simple and grand truths which render him the first of teachers. He stated the great law of compensation, — a fact as natural and as necessary as the shining of the light. Whosoever so serves the Right as to relinquish all that he has in its service, leaving all to follow it, receives on the spot a hundred-fold of all that he sacrifices, and an imperishable existence hereafter. When Jesus consecrated himself to a work that required him to abjure self utterly, he instantly became filled with life and with power, and entered into filial relations to the Highest. So is it, as he knew from that experience, with all who give up all for the Truth. Do what we may, resign what we may for the sake of the Divine kingdom, it is never for a moment under any obligations to us. We are paid as we go, full measure, heaped up into our bosoms and running over. We give up things in which our right of possession is very

imperfect, and must at all events be soon cancelled, and in return we receive imperishable gifts that cannot be taken from us: hearts more and more cleansed of all base desires, understandings more and more liberated from all disabling prejudices,—in a word, a higher life. Such is the simple truth in the eternal nature of things. And how naturally is the expression of it by Jesus connected with the incident we have been considering!

After stating this great truth, perceiving that his disciples were building high hopes upon their early adhesion to him, he repeated a proverbial expression, “Many that are first will be last, and the last first,” and then, in a natural and characteristic way, went on to illustrate it by the parable of the householder who went out at different hours of the day to hire laborers to work in his vineyard, and at the end of the day paid them all alike,—a parable which is misunderstood to teach that they who refuse to work until the last hour will be just as well off as they who bear the burden and heat of the day, whereas the aim of this parable was to teach that no difference would be made between those who were called into the vineyard early, and others who might be called at a later period, and who would gladly have gone into the vineyard at an earlier hour had they been summoned.

But the passages, the truth and consistency of which I have now sought to unfold, do not stand alone in these respects. The same characteristics will be found to pervade the four Gospels, when they are studied aright. Their intrinsic truth is very striking, in the connection of the temptation of Jesus with his baptism. What can more thoroughly conform to nature, than that an occasion of extraordinary spiritual exaltation should be followed by restlessness and trial? The temptation occurs, and this without the writers of the history being aware of it, just where it should, in order to be true to nature. The same may be said of the agony in the Garden, subsequent as it was to that extraordinary self-command with which Jesus had put aside his own burden to comfort his weeping followers, and occurring as it did at a lonely night-hour, and in a lonely place, and just when his suspense was the most intolerable.

Brief, disjointed, fragmentary as the four Gospels appear, they show to a degree in which no other writings approach them the graceful unity of truth and nature. And I repeat, it is altogether impossible to separate the spirit of Christ from the facts of his history, so intimately and vitally are they intermingled. The soul and the body are not more truly one.

We often regret that the accounts of Jesus are not more full; so much might have been told that is not told. And it certainly would have been very interesting had we been favored with more particulars. But then it should be considered that the fullest accounts that could have been written would still have been far from perfect; for it is not possible to relate the history of any person or thing so fully as to leave no question unanswered, no curiosity ungratified.

As completeness in respect of fulness of detail is quite out of the question, the thing to be desired in a history is, that what it tells, be it much or little, shall be told in the way in which only what is true and what the narrator knows to be true can be told, that is, in such a way as to imply the untold. When one relates what he is not moved to relate by a pure sense of truth, when he is, wilfully or under a delusion of the imagination, fabricating a story, he cannot afford to leave anything unexplained. He is certain, either, at one point or another, unconsciously to contradict the truth of things, or he must take care to make his story as complete as possible in itself, since it stands unrelated to anything out of his own mind. To him, on the other hand, who is telling what he knows, the

facts with their circumstances are all so plain, that he is constantly and unconsciously led to take it for granted that, when others once see only so much as he tells them, they must see much else. He imagines that he is telling a great deal more than he really does tell. It lies all spread out plainly before his own mind, and, without being aware of it, he is continually assuming that those to whom he is speaking stand at the same point of view with himself, and see all that he sees and as he sees it. I am myself conscious all the while, in writing these pages, of this tendency to take for granted that the position of my reader is identical with my own. There is no remedy for it that I know of but in that excellent Christian rule given by Goethe with admirable wisdom to reviewers, and worthy of observance by readers also, requiring them, as they would find truth and serve it, and do justice to any book, to endeavor to put themselves at the stand-point of its author, and read it with his eyes, as if, in short, they had written it themselves.

The disposition to assume that others see what we see, is especially evident in children and uneducated persons. Their narratives of what they have witnessed, — how brief and meagre! And yet what they tell, being true,

implies the untold. There is a great charm in this simplicity. It has an eminently suggestive quality. When once appreciated, it so stimulates the hearer's sense of truth, or the reader's, as the case may be, that he is inspired to divine much that is lacking in the narrative. Thus it is that they who read the book of Nature aright gather great meanings from slight hints, and discover facts not directly announced.

It is in this way that the four Gospels are of singular value as mere historical compositions. In form, what could be more slight and defective? In spirit, they are, like the events of which they tell, full of nature. But the false ideas that have prevailed concerning their origin and character have, in times past, entirely hidden from sight their unequalled excellence in this respect, and it escapes the notice of later and bolder critics, intent as they are upon making out the four Gospels to be little else than compilations of legends.





VII

THE NATURALNESS OF CERTAIN FABLES
FOUND IN HIS HISTORY





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STUDYING the history of Jesus as we study all other writings, taking care to accord its just value to every circumstance stated or implied, I recognize as a consideration to which due weight must be given, that events so wonderful as those that make up substantially the life of Jesus could not have failed to produce such a perturbation of mind at the time as, impairing the powers of correct observation and sound judgment, must have given occasion to false impressions and fabulous rumors. It is contrary to all experience and to human nature to suppose that so remarkable a person as Jesus should have appeared, and that such extraordinary things should have been done by him, and the minds of people not have been most deeply moved.

It is because little or no account has been made of the state of mind which naturally and necessarily followed upon the appearance of Jesus, that the Gospels are still so imperfectly understood. Had the faith in the substantial truth of his history, which has been so loudly professed, had any genuine life in it, or, letting alone faith, had there been only so much as a vivid conception of the main facts, some insight might have been obtained into the truth of his history. But, false theories of the nature of the facts having rendered a genuine faith in them impossible, there has been no appreciation of the sensation which events so extraordinary caused ; a sensation to be kept constantly in view if the Gospels are to be understood, as it was mainly owing to that, that these writings are what they are.

It would be equally unnatural to suppose that the excitement thus produced could have existed without creating marvels and the rumors of marvels. The imagination, when inflamed by the wonderful, always gives birth to wonders of its own. It dreams dreams. It magnifies. It creates. And eyes, dilated by astonishment, see visions which it is unable to distinguish from realities.¹

¹ I content myself above with ■ brief reference to the fact

That marvellous stories are told about a person or an event, so far from giving occasion to question the reality of the person or the fact, creates a very strong presumption, not only that the person really existed, or that the event actually took place, but that the person or the event, about whom such stories are told and thought to be likely, could have been of no ordinary character. It is a groundless fear, therefore, to apprehend that, when certain passages of a history are pronounced fabulous, the whole history is brought into doubt. It does not follow by any means. The very truth of the main facts narrated, from its extraordinary character, may be the occasion of fables and errors. In the histories of remarkable events and persons some misconceptions and exaggerations are only what are to be looked for, as the

that exaggerated and fabulous reports always get abroad respecting events at all out of the usual course of things. The explanation of the fact is, however, as easy as the fact is common. It is quite impossible to give an account of any event which shall be absolutely complete. In every narrative there must always be omissions. Loopholes are thus left for inferences to slip in and take the air of circumstances; and the imagination is constantly taxed to fill up the story. The necessity we are under of making a story credible by making it consistent, stimulates the inventive faculty. And when we bring to mind how greatly individuals differ in the power of observation and attention, and in liveliness of imagination, we cannot be surprised that the accounts even of ordinary occurrences always gain and lose and vary so much.

inseparable accompaniments of the truth. So far from throwing any doubt upon the substantial correctness of the history, they bear witness to it.

By attending to these considerations we are enabled to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of certain portions of the Gospels, otherwise involved in great difficulty, such as, for example, the Birth of Jesus, his Transfiguration so called, and the apparition of Angels attending his first appearance alive after his crucifixion.

The accounts of two of these events (if not of all the three), of the Birth of Jesus, and of the Angels seen at his tomb, may be classed together, inasmuch as the facts or extraordinary appearances narrated are similar in this, that they have no conceivable connection with him. What I mean to say is, they are not his works, they cannot be referred to his will. They cannot so much as be imagined to have been among the acts which are directly ascribed in the records to his agency. In this they are unlike all the other miracles.

One then of two things must be true concerning them. Either they were preternatural occurrences, to be attributed to a power working outside and independently of Jesus, or they are the creations of the human imagination. In

other words, as they are not ascribed to his agency, and cannot be conceived to have been produced by him, the question is, To what cause external to him are they to be traced, to a human or a superhuman power?

They are not to be referred to a superhuman source until it is made clear beyond all doubt that the passages that narrate them admit of no other explanation. There is no principle of inquiry which it is more hazardous to sound knowledge to disregard, than that which forbids us to refer any alleged fact to an extraordinary cause, when its origin may be discovered in circumstances within the usual or probable order of things.

With respect to the alleged miraculous birth of Jesus, it is to be considered, —

1. That, although there may be much in the popular theology, there is nothing in the teachings of Jesus, that requires that he should have been born out of the established course of nature; so that in the examination of the accounts of his birth we need not be under the bias of an erroneous idea of its importance.

2. He himself never laid claim to an extraordinary origin. He never made any allusion to his birth.

3. There is not a hint in the history of his

public life that, during his life, he was supposed to be, so far as anything was known of his origin, any other than the son of Joseph. His townsmen evidently had heard no wonderful stories of his birth. Their exclamation was, when they heard him speak in the synagogue, "Is not this Joseph's son?"¹ And his own family would hardly have ventured to think him "beside himself," had they been accustomed to look upon him as a person miraculously created.

4. It cannot be a matter of prime importance how he was born, since, of the four Gospels, the authors of two of them have not thought it worth while to tell us anything about him before he was thirty years of age, when he first appeared in public; and one of these was written by John, the beloved disciple, who must have known, if any one knew, any extraordinary circumstances attending his birth, as, after the death of Jesus, John took the mother of Jesus to his own home, and wrote his Gospel for the avowed purpose of proving Jesus to be the Messiah. It is unaccountable that he should omit all reference to the birth of Jesus, had that event been extraordinary.

5. The brief notices of the birth of Jesus found in the other two Gospels, Matthew's and

¹ Luke iv. 22.

Luke's, are little else than stories of private dreams and visions, in striking contrast with the narratives of his public life. The wonderful events of his public career are noonday facts, taking place, for the most part, under conditions that preclude the idea of delusion.

6. The story in Matthew's Gospel of the "wise men from the East," the *magi*, who came to search for the illustrious child, whose birth they had discovered by astrology, "by his star," is an evident fable. If it be not so regarded, then it must be conceded that special communications from God were made to men through Persian magic.

7. The stories concerning the birth of Jesus, on the face of them, are not direct and original testimonies to the facts stated, but traditions that came to the ears of the writers some time after the facts alleged took place. There is no trace of them in his subsequent history.

8. And in the eighth and last place, nothing could be more natural than that marvels should go abroad respecting the birth of one whose life was so wonderful. To my mind this consideration is decisive. I reject the accounts of the birth of Jesus regarded as literal statements of actual facts, not so much on account of their intrinsic improbability as because, taken as fa-

bles, it is so natural that just such stories should have been told, and in such an age have gained easy credence. It could not be that wonderful stories of his birth should not have got circulated about so wonderful a person. Indeed, at a period long subsequent to his death, there was a whole gospel of fables fabricated about his early years: the apocryphal gospel of "the Infancy of Jesus." When we consider how mightily great men always inflame the imagination, what a disposition there has always been to magnify and deify them, and how, without a word, rightly interpreted, in the recorded life and sayings of Jesus to warrant the idea, Christians have persisted in representing him as the very God himself, we can find no difficulty in accounting for the fact that, at a very early period, marvellous stories should have been told of his birth. Like the clouds exhaled from the earth by the sun at its rising, fables gather around the beginnings of all things great, of great nations and great men. And the greater they are, the more extravagant the fables. The imagination fascinated by greatness always sets itself busily at work to invest its first appearance with what it deems to be an appropriate splendor.¹ Thus, from the story

¹ "The inventors of useful arts, the poets and prophets of the early stages of a nation's growth, the promulgators of new systems of religion, ethics, and philosophy, or of new codes of laws,

of his birth, we may infer the extraordinary character of his life. Had he been an ordinary person, such a story never would have been thought of. That his parents, at and near the time of his birth, may have had dreams, which the remarkable character of his life caused to be recollected and told far and wide, is by no means impossible. The name given to him, Jesus, signifying Saviour, Deliverer, although not an uncommon name, may intimate the hopes that were cherished of him. Considering, however, the strong tendency always existing to invent extraordinary incidents or to exaggerate ordinary circumstances in connection with the birth of great men, I receive with distrust the story of the nativity of Jesus. What amount of truth there may be in it, is of small moment to determine, as the essential truth of his life and teaching is in no degree dependent upon the manner of his birth.

As the Life of Jesus, as a whole, stimulated the love of the marvellous to the creation of fables in regard to his origin, so the one most wonderful fact of his history, his reappearance

have often been looked upon as messengers from Heaven, and after their death have had divine honors paid to them, while fabulous tales have been told of the prodigies which accompanied their birth," &c. — Sir Charles Lyell.

alive on the third morning after his crucifixion, was in like manner fitted so to affect the minds of the immediate witnesses of that event, that it was not possible that they should see it precisely as it was. It was not possible that their powers of observation should not have been greatly disturbed. Hence it comes that the four different accounts of that eventful morning show great variations, variations by which, by the way, the commentators have been very needlessly embarrassed. They are embarrassing, it is true, upon the theory of the miraculous verbal inspiration of the Gospels, with which theory all discrepancies are obviously inconsistent; and it is no wonder that they who accept this theory have made such labored attempts to harmonize the narratives of the resurrection of Jesus. But, taking the Gospels for what their whole structure shows them to be, human compositions, and dealing with them as such, we look for the variations inseparable from human productions. It would be a suspicious circumstance, indeed it would cast a fatal doubt over the fact itself, were there no traces, in the accounts of so extraordinary an event, of the disturbing influence which it must have had upon the minds of those who witnessed it.

As I have remarked in relation to the stories

of the birth of Jesus, so in regard to the accounts of angels seen at his tomb, it is not their intrinsic incredibility alone that causes me to question them. It is the entirely natural way in which the women and others fell into the mistake of supposing that they saw angels, that leads me to doubt whether it really were angels whom they saw. In former publications, I have endeavored to examine minutely the four narratives of the resurrection of Jesus. I will therefore, as briefly as possible, indicate the points which help us to a knowledge of what actually occurred on that eventful morning when Jesus, who had expired on the cross, was seen again alive, and spoken with. Let me offer one or two preliminary observations.

In the first place, the impossibility of maintaining the exact, absolute truth of these four accounts of the reappearance of Jesus alive on the third morning after his crucifixion is manifest in the failure of every attempt that has been made so to harmonize them that no one of the four shall be chargeable with the slightest mistake. Now what proof of the artlessness of their structure can we need or desire more decisive than this? From their discrepancies, obvious, and, upon the supposition that these accounts are all strictly true, irreconcilable, is it not at least evi-

dent that it was not at all the purpose of these stories to make out a case? Not a trace of any such purpose can be discovered in them by the most critical eye. What remains, then, but that we should take them for what they so plainly appear to be, namely, entirely honest records, I do not say of what actually took place, but of what their authors believed to have taken place. Freely, without misgiving, in unconscious simplicity, they tell us what they thought they saw. Their stories are faithful records of certain impressions. Just as plainly as this is their character, so plainly is it within our ability to determine whether these impressions were the work of illusion, or whether they were made by facts; and if made by facts, we may determine what the facts were that made such impressions. I know that human minds are liable to illusions, great illusions. But I know also that there are conditions under which illusion is impossible. If it be not so, if we cannot ever certainly distinguish illusion from fact, why should we ever open our eyes? We can dream better with them closed.

Furthermore, is there anything in these artless stories of this great event more evident, than that there was not one of the disciples of Jesus who was then expecting his return to life,

not one who was then dreaming of seeing him alive again? Not one went to the sepulchre to meet him coming therefrom. Some women went thither with spices to do honor to his remains. We may wonder that they were not looking for him to come to life, but they were not. We may be perfectly sure, then, if an expectation of his resurrection had then existed among his disciples, that, artless as these narratives are, they would have told us of it, or we should have been able to infer its existence from something related therein. But there is not the shadow of a hint of the existence of any such expectation in the minds of the actors in the scene. On the contrary, all goes to show that, at that early hour after his death, not a thought of his returning to life had crossed their minds. We are told previously in the Gospels, that Jesus assured his disciples again and again that he would rise from the dead. Although they have given us no intimations of the reason why, immediately upon his expiring on the cross, they did not recollect his predictions, the reason is at hand. His prediction of his resurrection, be it remembered, was invariably connected with the prediction of his violent death. And the idea of his violent death, believing as they believed that he was the mag-

nificent Messiah, was shocking to them to the last degree. As they could not for a moment entertain the horrible thought, they gave no entertainment to the prediction of his resurrection consequent upon his death. And, be it observed, Jesus is recorded to have uttered the prediction of his death just at the moments when his disciples were most highly excited by the idea of his being the Messiah, when the people were thronging around him, full of wonder at his power.¹ We are told again and again that when he spoke of his death and his rising from the dead, they did not understand him. These ideas found no lodgment in their minds.² And accordingly, when the terrible event actually occurred, when he had expired on the cross, they were stupefied, crushed by the blow. The one dread fact that he was dead, dead, filled their minds to the exclusion of all recollection of what he had said to them.

So much being premised, I proceed to say that the difficulties that encumber the four narratives of the resurrection all vanish, and their discrepancies are all reconciled, and in ways wonderfully natural, by one supposition, namely, this: that it was Jesus himself, newly risen, who

¹ Luke ix. 43 - 45.

² Matt. xvi. 21 - 23 ; Luke xviii. 31 - 34.

was mistaken by the soldiers and the women for an apparition. This strikes the reader, of course, as a bold supposition. It is not, however, arbitrarily made. It is suggested, not by any of the actors in the scene, but by circumstances which there was no human intention of inventing. Allowing for the exaggerating effects of surprise and terror, we ascertain that there were no supernatural persons present. But some one was there. Who was the unknown person? Difficult as it may be to imagine that it was Jesus himself alive again, there is a greater difficulty in imagining that it was any other than he. We cannot suppose it to have been another than he without presupposing the grossest absurdities. But let us look more closely into the narratives.

2. It is remarkable that two of the accounts, Mark's and Luke's, make no mention of *angels* at the tomb. Mark states only that the women were accosted there by "a *young man* in a long white garment," and Luke speaks of "*two men* in shining garments." And for the angel descending from heaven with a countenance like lightning, and raiment white as snow, and rolling away the stone, and for the accompanying earthquake, an account of which is found only in Matthew, (the three other Gospels giving us to

understand that the stone was removed before the women reached the place,) we are indebted to the soldiers placed to guard the tomb, and of whom it is stated that they were so affrighted that they became as dead men. The stories told by men in such a condition must be taken with great allowance for the exaggerations of terror. The stone rolling away from the mouth of the tomb and jarring the earth, and Jesus appearing in the white grave-clothes, were naturally magnified, by the fright into which the guard were thrown, into an earthquake, and a supernatural being suddenly descending from heaven.¹ It is curious to note that Matthew's account is so imperfect, that it allows no time for Jesus to have risen. "And behold, there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake and become as dead men. And the angel answered and said to the

¹ It may be that the soldiers told only of a figure suddenly appearing in white, and coming before them, they knew not whence, and that their Jewish listeners, when they repeated the story, described what the soldiers said they saw as an angel descending from heaven. Roman soldiers would not be likely to talk about an *angel*, which is a Jewish idea.

women, Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen," &c. From which we are left to infer either that Jesus had risen and gone away before the stone was removed, or, immediately upon its removal, had passed out invisibly. As both these inferences are improbable, and only aggravate the difficulty, we cannot fail to perceive that Matthew's account is very imperfect, especially when it is easy to see how just such an account as his came to be given.

It came in this way. As the reports of the extraordinary appearance at the tomb came, one after another, in swift succession, to the ears of the disciples, — first the rumor through the soldiers of an earthquake and an angel coming down from heaven, then the report of the women rushing in, pale and breathless, declaring that they had seen a person all in white, who had told them that Jesus was alive, — as this story instantly followed upon the other, what could be more natural than that these reports should be mixed together, and so the impression would be taken by some that the women had seen all that the soldiers saw? And again, when shortly afterwards Mary came and declared that she had seen Jesus himself and spoken with him, since the other women had gone with Mary

to the tomb it is equally natural that another erroneous impression should be made, namely, that all the women had seen Jesus. And so we find it stated in Matthew. As they had all gone together to the tomb, in the excitement and hurry that arose, when all but Mary came running back with the story and the message of the angel, and were almost immediately followed by Mary, declaring that she had seen Jesus himself alive, is it not manifest how just such an account as Matthew's should have gone abroad?

There remains to be explained the story of the two angels seen by Mary. As the women, upon first approaching the tomb, were considering among themselves how they should get the stone removed from the entrance, they were startled at finding that it was already moved. Very naturally supposing that the enemies of Jesus, who had pursued him so relentlessly in life, were unwilling that even his remains should rest in peace where his friends had laid them, Mary with the natural precipitancy that marks all the movements of her mind on that morning, the instant she caught sight of the open tomb, rushed back to the city to tell Peter and John that the body had been taken away. Her companions remained on the spot, wondering what could have happened. But they were still more

startled by being suddenly accosted by “a young man in a long white garment.” This unknown person was, as I suppose, Jesus himself, still wrapt in the grave-clothes. Is he not betrayed in the word which this stranger sent to Peter? The last act of Peter’s had been to disclaim with oaths all knowledge of Jesus, who now, with characteristic magnanimity, hastened to assure his false but repentant friend that he was forgiven. As the white cloth which had been wrapt about the head of Jesus when he was laid in the tomb, but which was now removed and laid by itself, was caught sight of by one or more of the women, it was mistaken, in their fright and in the dim light, for another person in white. Having received from this unknown person the wonderful news that Jesus had risen, the women rushed away to tell the disciples. After they had left the place, Mary returned with Peter and John, who went into the tomb to verify the report of Mary, that the body had been carried off. They were amazed to find that, while the body was no longer there, the grave-clothes remained. They left the spot, evidently satisfied that the body had been taken away. Mary remained weeping at the entrance of the cave. And as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She must have been surprised, as

Peter and John were just before, by the white grave-clothes, which in the dim light, and to her eyes suffused with tears, appeared to her only as two spots of whiteness. At the moment that she caught sight of them, before she could make out what it was that she saw, she was again startled by a voice speaking to her and asking, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Involuntarily she answered the question, but before she ceased speaking she became aware of some one approaching behind her, and as she finished speaking she turned round and perceived Jesus standing near, but did not recognize him, partly because she only glanced at him and partly because the idea of his being there alive is the last thing that could have occurred to her. She supposed it was the gardener. He said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?"

Now what can be plainer than that Mary could have had no idea at the moment that the white objects which she saw in the tomb were angels? Had she then believed them to be angels, would she have turned her back upon them at once to converse with the gardener? Would she have sought a solution of the mystery from an ordinary man, when supernatural beings were at hand? Could any ordinary

sound have distracted her attention from them? It is evident, she saw nothing but the white grave-clothes. The sight took her by surprise. She knew not what to make of it. But afterwards, when she found that the other women were understood to have seen angels in white, she instantly, with characteristic precipitancy, and as was very natural, leapt to the conclusion that the white things which she saw, and knew not at the moment what to make of, were the very angels whom her friends had seen. And as they had spoken to her friends, so had they, she believed, spoken to her; and that first question, "Woman, why weepest thou"? which came she knew not whence at the time, and which, in fact, was addressed to her by Jesus coming behind her, was put, she was confident, by those same angels.

The words of Jesus to Mary, "Touch me not, for I have not yet ascended," &c., addressed to her after she had recognized him, are obscure. But they are explained by a circumstance mentioned by Matthew. Matthew states that, when the women met Jesus, they held him by his feet. Now as it was Mary alone who saw Jesus, it must have been she who held him by his feet, although John does not mention the circumstance. The act was the instinctive

and irrepressible impulse of her emotions. She clasped his knees convulsively, with mingled feelings of wonder and awe and delight, and partly to assure herself that it was really he, that her eyes, inflamed with weeping, did not deceive her. She held to him as if she would never let him go. Accordingly he said to her, in effect, "Do not stop to embrace me now. You will have other opportunities of seeing me. I have not yet left the world." As Mary, when upon declaring that she had seen Jesus and being told by her incredulous hearers that it was only a phantom, would insist that she had seized hold of him, and knew that it was really he, thus having the evidence of the sense of touch, his precise language may not be given, and he may be reported to have said, "*Touch* me not," when he possibly used words less obscure.

Is it possible that these accounts of the appearance of Jesus alive on the morning of the third day after his crucifixion, which thus so delicately and all undesignedly illustrate the workings of human nature, are crude fictions of the ignorant love of the marvellous? It cannot be. How exquisitely is the one fact that Jesus was alive and present there, interwoven

with a quivering web of human emotions! Let it be that we are utterly in the dark as to the way in which he came to life, and as to the purpose or meaning of his resurrection. Nevertheless; the fact is proved by evidence which there was no human thought of furnishing. He is shown to have been there before any one of the immediate actors in the scene knew it, and by circumstances so perfectly in accord with one another and with human nature, that we can as easily suppose the invention by man of a new animal, which shall be complete in itself and in harmony with all nature, as this story to be the fabrication of human wit. The evidence of the resurrection of Jesus is not the evidence of man. It is the evidence of Nature, of God.

We are bound to admit every fact that is proved, although we know neither the manner of its occurrence nor the purpose which it serves, resting in the faith, until we receive light on these points, that it has its meaning, and that, some time or other, it will be found in as perfect agreement with the laws of nature as any other fact.

Bound thus by irresistible evidence to believe that Jesus was alive again on that memorable morning, I believe that it will hereafter appear

that he came to life through the extraordinary force of will with which he was endowed, and by which he healed the sick and raised the dead; or, in other words, that consciousness returned to him by an action of the mind in itself no more truly inscrutable in this case than it is in our daily waking from sleep. Only we are familiar with it in the instance of waking, as we often do at will, from sleep. This is the only difference. When it shall be thus far seen into, the resurrection of Jesus will be valued as a revelation of the power of the spirit over the flesh. It will prove to be a fact fundamental to a truly spiritual philosophy and theory of being. At present a false material philosophy renders this great event useless and incredible.

Why Jesus returned to life, I cannot venture further than to say that he was moved by a strong spiritual sympathy, bringing him back for a brief space to the scene of labor and suffering to which his whole great soul had been given. But I am free to confess, the fact of his resurrection suggests questions to which I have no answer. They will be answered hereafter, I doubt not, in the returning light of that spiritual philosophy, of which it was given to ancient wise men to have a vision, but which

has been displaced in these latter days by the materialism that has triumphed over us through our mechanical inventions and the achievements of physical science.

There remains to be considered the story of the alleged transfiguration, upon a certain occasion, of the person of Jesus, an event which, upon the face of it, and taken to the letter, is glaringly at variance with his singularly spiritual teachings and character. The glory which invests him is the glory of his moral nature, not a visible brightness. The story of his transfiguration, literally understood, is external and Jewish.

But I shall not dwell upon the intrinsic inconsistency of a literal interpretation of it, because it is not that that decides me to reject it. Whoever will candidly and carefully examine the three different versions of the story, seeking only to discover what actually occurred, will find positive and most interesting reasons for believing that what is called the transfiguration of Jesus was a dream of Peter's.

In explanation of this event I take the liberty to repeat here substantially, though with some additions, what I have said in a former work.¹

¹ Jesus and his Biographers. 1838.

The interest of the subject is my apology for the repetition.

“According to Luke, ‘Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep’ when the spectacle began, ‘and when they were awake they saw his glory and the two men that stood with him.’ ‘Heavy with sleep,’—this phrase expresses merely a state of drowsiness. The original signifies that Peter and the others were all sound asleep, literally sunk under a heavy weight of slumber, from which they were suddenly aroused, and were therefore not in a condition to observe correctly.

“Although it is not so stated, yet there is reason to suppose that what occurred, occurred in the night. That the disciples were all asleep furnishes ground for the supposition. Darkness was requisite to exhibit such a vision. Daylight would have dimmed its splendor, however brilliant it may have been.

“It appears by comparing the different accounts, that the principal particulars took place at one and the same moment. ‘*As Moses and Elias departed,*’ Peter spoke, saying, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here, and let us build,’ &c. ‘*And while Peter was speaking,* a cloud came up and a voice out of the cloud.’ ‘*And when the disciples heard it,* they fell on their faces

and were sore afraid.' So that, at the same moment, Moses and Elias were disappearing, Peter was speaking, the cloud coming up and enveloping them, and the disciples starting from their slumbers only to fall prostrate with fear."

Now in order to determine what actually occurred, we must bring into view who they were of whom this story is told, and what was the state of their minds. They were simple-minded men, who, so powerfully had they been moved, had forsaken their homes, and were following Jesus about in the confident expectation that he "would lay aside his ordinary garb and appear in more than regal splendor, and that, according to a popular belief, the majestic old prophets and patriarchs would rise from the dead, and, encircling the magnificent Messiah, would attend him on his glorious way and aid him in redeeming Israel. Some of the people, as appears from a conversation which Jesus had with his disciples only a week before, already entertained the idea that he was one of the old prophets, Jeremiah or Elias, risen from the dead. His personal followers, those poor fishermen, whose world hitherto the shores of the Galilean lake had bounded, — what honors were to be theirs, they, the earliest adherents, the chosen favorites, of the great king! These bril-

liant visions crowded on them till their hearts ached with the intensity of their imaginings. The ardent and excitable mind of Peter, particularly, was stirred to the inmost. Nothing, perhaps, but the overawing influence of him whom they were following, prevented them from being carried away, out of themselves, by their fervid expectations. In this state of mind, Peter, James, and John, the three whom he particularly distinguished, and who, as they believed, were to occupy the most eminent places in his kingdom, accompanied him up on a mountain, whither he retired from the presence of the multitude. There, as night came on, they threw themselves on the ground and fell asleep." Naturally their day dreams mingled with and shaped the visions of the night. As Peter was dreaming of the coming glories of the kingdom, of Moses and Elias, and of that strange event, "the decease of Jesus at Jerusalem," which their Master had talked about shortly before, and which, shocking the mind of Peter, made such an impression on him that it connected itself with his dreams, he was suddenly startled out of his sleep by a flash of lightning, and thunder also, from "the bright cloud" (a thunder-cloud) that came up, hanging low over the elevated spot where he was sleeping. As there is noth-

ing in external nature that can at all represent the rapidity of thought under any sudden excitement, and as distinct and remarkable dreams are sometimes caused by the very noise which awakens the sleeper, the light and noise which aroused Peter from his sleep may have occasioned his dream. Suddenly awakened, to his bewildered and only half-awake mind, Moses and Elias, naturally enough, appeared to be vanishing. Under this impression, in his bewilderment, he exclaimed aloud, and in great excitement: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tents, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." He would fain have detained the departing company, while the rude idea of providing such homely accommodations for such illustrious personages betrays a mind still in the land of dreams. That he was greatly excited, is clear from the remark in one of the versions of the incident, that he knew not what to say, for he was very much amazed; and by a remark in another that he did not know what he was saying, it is clear that the vision was confined to Peter. Had James and John also seen Moses and Elias, there would have been no difficulty in understanding Peter's exclamation, and they could not have thought that he did not know what

he was saying. The illumination of the person of Jesus was caused by the lightning flashing on him, or it may have been the transient creation of Peter's excited imagination. The words which, as Jesus had told them, came to him, a voice from heaven at his baptism, occurred with like vividness to Peter, and the thunder, that mysterious thing at all times, occurring at that moment, coincidently with the vivid conception formed in Peter's mind, seemed to bear supernatural witness to Jesus as the Messiah.

The vision passed only in the mind of Peter. James and John started at the same moment from sleep, awakened by the thunder and by Peter speaking aloud in a rapid and excited manner. But they awoke in a passion of terror, only to fall prostrate on their faces. Probably they caught sight of the person of Jesus illuminated by the lightning. He came to them and raised them up, and they looked about them and saw no one but Jesus only.

The first impression received from the narratives is that James and John, as well as Peter, were witnesses of the vision. But this impression is readily corrected, and chiefly by recollecting the confident, assuming disposition of Peter. Without any warrant, as it appears, but his

own forward temper, he continually took it upon himself to speak for the rest. It has been well conjectured that the question that Peter once put to Jesus, "How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him," was occasioned by some difficulty that had arisen between him and one or more of his fellow-disciples caused by his overbearing temper, especially as they had been disputing a little while before which should be the greatest in his kingdom.¹ It is very natural, therefore, upon the present occasion, that he should impose upon James and John his explanation of what had happened, and of what had startled them all so much. They had no account of their own to give. They could not contradict him, nor could they have been at all disposed to do so. That something wonderful had taken place, they had no doubt. They had witnessed, in part, what Peter affirmed he had seen in full. And besides, they were childlike men, who had already seen so many wonders wrought in broad daylight by their Master, that it would have been strange had they not been predisposed by their recent experience to believe in wonders, especially at such an hour, and under such circumstances, and so to accept, without hesitation, Peter's rep-

¹ Matt. xviii.

resentations. It is evident, however, from the explicit statements of the Gospels, that they saw little or nothing, as they were so terrified that they fell instantly upon their faces.

It may seem difficult to reconcile with this view of the transfiguration the silence of Jesus. Why did he not correct the error of his disciples? I do not see that he was required to do more than he did. They were greatly excited, and he could not question the fact that Peter's mind was powerfully impressed. They were not in a condition to be reasoned with. He contented himself with enjoining it upon them not to talk about it, as it would have inflamed their own minds, and, if rumored abroad, would have increased the popular excitement, already so great that it required the utmost care on his part to prevent it from breaking out beyond control.

It is interesting to observe how the view here taken of this incident presupposes, and indeed necessitates, the truth of the antecedent history. Such a dream and such misapprehensions could not have had an existence had not the previous wonders of the life of Jesus been true, had not the conversation occurred between him and his disciples which is stated to have taken place about a week before, — if, in fine, precisely the

series of events related in the Gospels had not occurred. So far from impairing the substantial truth of the history, the transfiguration, thus understood, springs from it and presupposes it.

There is nothing in the Gospels more truly wonderful than the Gospels are themselves in their honesty and artlessness. It is the history itself that furnishes us with the means of correcting its own errors. It is not to other witnesses that we go to expose and rectify its mistakes. From its own statements we gather the truth, which it tells with the confiding, unguarded freedom of a child. It is of transparent truthfulness and simplicity.





VIII

THE GENESIS OF THE GOSPELS





VIII

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JESUS himself never wrote a word. Nor, in such provision as he is recorded to have made² for the dissemination of truth, did he make any allusion to the necessity or propriety of preparing written statements of his acts and sayings. This method of publication he never took into account. He thought of communicating truth only by word of mouth, by living Gospels and living Epistles.

This indifference to written methods of publication is characteristic of the genius of his Great Movement, and shows how little it was in his purpose to organize a formal religion. It strikingly marks the beginnings of the literary his-

¹ This chapter, here revised and enlarged, first appeared in the *Christian Examiner*, January, 1861.

² Matth. x. and xxviii. 19, 20.

tory of Christianity. The truth that dwelt in Jesus appears to have descended unwillingly into a habitation made with hands. It passed slowly into an authoritative literary form, and only at the last, incidentally, and as it was necessitated in the course of things. It would seem as if the living spirit shrank with prophetic instinct from the corruption of the dead letter, and relucted at the unequal companionship. It must be considered, moreover, in explanation of the little concern shown by the first teachers of Christianity for the letter as a vehicle for the diffusion of truth, that the letter was not in those days the rapid and powerful instrument which it has since become. It was a rude agency then, but poorly suited to the purposes of earnest men.

First came Letters, Epistles, — twenty-one in number. Of these twenty-one only seven are ascribed to immediate disciples of Jesus. And of these seven, the Second of Peter, the Second and Third of John, and the Epistle of Jude, are of disputed authorship. So that three only of the whole number are received as the undoubted works of the personal friends of Jesus. The rest are Epistles of Paul, who did not become a disciple of Jesus until some years after his death.

And in all these earliest Christian writings, there is no mention of the particulars of the life of Jesus, excepting his death and resurrection. This silence appears difficult to be accounted for on the supposition of the truth of the previous history of Jesus. It strikes one as very strange, that no allusion should be made in the Epistles to the facts related in the Gospels, if those facts were true. In explanation of this remarkable feature of the Epistles, I do not content myself, or think to satisfy the reader, with the common suggestion, which professes to be an explanation of the fact when it is only a statement of it, that they were called forth by circumstances, and designed not to recall past events, but, for the most part, to meet new questions that arose. There are positive reasons why the Epistles are just what they are, why they make no reference to past events.

Let it be borne in mind, in the first place, that in the rapid succession of stirring events which the personal disciples of Jesus, after his disappearance, were witnessing, and in which they were sharing, there came no period when they might pause deliberately to recall and record the past. They were too much occupied in the exciting work of making history, to turn from it to the comparatively tame business of

writing it, writing it too, when they were workers, not writers, and when the things to be recorded had already become public matters and the world was fast becoming acquainted with them. But there is another thing to be especially considered.

The difficulty which we find in accounting for the silence of the Epistles in regard to the events of the life of Jesus disappears when we bring into view a fact, which has been entirely overlooked, and which, by the way, not only solves this difficulty, but must modify very materially our whole idea of primitive Christianity; namely, that, while we regard the Christian revelation as substantially closing with the personal disappearance of Christ, it was not, by any means, so regarded by his disciples. On the contrary, when he had disappeared, in their eyes the great Dispensation had not begun. It is true, they were fully persuaded that they had seen and heard the glorious Messiah. But it was the Messiah *incognito*. And all that had been was, in their view, only the brief introduction to what was shortly to follow. The great Coming was yet to be. They were looking earnestly for the visible return of Christ, and that very soon, and with demonstrations of power which would cast all that had been witnessed

into the shade. They stood with their backs to the Past in an attitude of absorbing expectation. The growing splendor of the near Future shone into their hearts, and so held them that they had scarcely a thought for what had been, one powerful effect of which must have been, while it modified, greatly to reanimate their long cherished hope of the Messiah. That hope was no longer traditional merely. It had received the fresher inspiration of personal knowledge; and it must have glowed with a new ardor now that it had approached so far towards fulfilment as to have identified the person of the expected Deliverer. Accordingly, the events of the life of Jesus, wonderful as they were at the time they happened, after his death rapidly grew to be common and "an old story." They were dwarfed by the lofty visions, which, as it was confidently believed, were about to be realized, and which filled the minds of the first Christians. Of all that had occurred, only the two greatest events, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, kept a high place in their minds. And even these facts, it is most interesting to observe, they referred to chiefly because they served as vehicles to convey some idea of the new and fervid emotions that engrossed them. They needed strong figures of speech to express their pro-

found experiences, and they found them in such forms of language as these: "If ye then be *risen* with Christ," "*crucified* with Christ," and so on. Such is the mode of alluding in the Epistles to the most prominent facts of the past. It was very natural under the circumstances. They are nowhere referred to in the way of formal narration, unless we except the fifteenth chapter of the First of Corinthians, where something of a brief narrative of the reappearance of Christ after death is found.¹ Nowhere else in the Epistles is there anything like an approach to a formal relation of past events.

Thus the memory of what Christ had done was in a manner lost, for a while, in the greatness in which he was shortly to reappear, and which, to the raised imaginations of the first disciples, was already arraying him anew in something of the magnificence which Jewish minds had so long found solace and joy in associating with the idea of the Messiah. He was present with them more intimately than ever, clothed moreover in the added sanctity of death, making all that he had been seem homely in comparison. In fine, looking every moment for his visible return in power and great glory, shining too from that

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 4-8. A short account of the origin of the Lord's Supper occurs in 1 Cor. xi. 23-25.

other and mysterious world into which he had passed, and from which he was to reappear, and for a revolution of unimagined grandeur, they had little inclination to dwell upon the familiar and fading past; or even if they did revert to it, they could hardly suppose that there was time left for preserving the memory of anything. The night was far spent. The day, the great day of the Lord, was at hand.¹

This state of mind in the primitive disciples being duly taken into account, the Epistles cannot be expected to furnish a history of the events by which they were preceded, nor will it be thought strange that no formal narratives of the past appear in them. What can be more natural than that they should be just what they are, — writings looking to the then present and the future, and scarcely to the past, — effusions of men who were too much engrossed with the near Future to admit of their dwelling on things gone by? If they were diverted at all from the future, it was to give attention to what was immediately present, and to exhort their fellow-

¹ The existence, in the primitive times of the Church, of a confident expectation of the speedy reappearance of Christ, is put beyond question by numerous passages in the Epistles, and by their general tenor, and by the 25th verse of the final chapter of the Gospel of John. See especially 1 Cor. xv. 51; 1 Thess. iv. 15 *et seq.*

believers to be in readiness for the coming of the Lord. To occupy themselves with things already sufficiently familiar to all about them, was not a work that they could take any interest in, little disposed as those men of action must have been to write at all. The more correctly we estimate the circumstances in which they were placed, and the consequent state of their minds, the more fully shall we be satisfied that these writings are just what were to have been looked for: results of what had previously occurred, a natural continuation of the series of events beginning with the life of Jesus, circles cast off upon the waters which had been so powerfully stirred by him.

But as time wore on, and the exciting expectation of his immediate reappearance and of a wholly new order of things subsided, the particulars of that great Life — being facts of a world-wide interest, as the illustrations of an original and godlike personality — gradually emerged, and began to repossess the attention which was their due, and which had been temporarily diverted from them; and narratives of his acts and sayings began to appear, fragmentary sketches of striking words and incidents, narratives and sketches, that possibly were made by unknown

hands at a very early period, a considerable time before they were multiplied in any number, and for private satisfaction, and with no distinct reference to the demand that might arise for them, and with no definite purpose beyond that of putting in an enduring form events essentially so interesting. Possibly the personal reappearance of Jesus being so long delayed may have led to the recalling of the past, to the gathering up from his life of whatever might reassure the faith in him which was put to trial by this disappointment. So it would seem from the fact that the passage, which I have already referred to (1 Cor. xv. 4-8),—one of only two passages in the Epistles where there is any approach to a narrative form of reference to past events,—was occasioned by the doubts that began to be expressed concerning the resurrection of the dead, doubts that arose probably from the delay of the coming of Christ, with which event the resurrection of the dead was expected to be coincident. Be this as it might, it is very evident that fragmentary accounts of the sayings and doings of Jesus appeared very early, and in such great numbers as led to the composition of one at least of our present Gospels. It is expressly stated by Luke, that he was moved to prepare his account of Christ “forasmuch as

many had taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of the things most surely believed " among the first disciples.

These early sketches, the materials out of which our present Gospels were in great part composed, came into existence, I suppose, in different quarters, and at various, although not long, intervals. They were taken down here and there, sometimes directly from the lips of some one of the immediate witnesses of the things related, or they were obtained from those who had had direct communication with the personal disciples of Jesus, or they were prepared by some of the actors in those scenes.

That some of the accounts of separate incidents, now found in the Gospels, may even have been written, as I have just intimated, at a very early period, indeed almost upon the spot and at the moment when the events narrated took place, will not seem wholly improbable, when once we come rightly to estimate the extraordinary character of the things said and done by Jesus, and the desire, working always with the resistless force of an instinct, to put in a permanent shape the memory of remarkable events, a desire than which there is no principle of human nature more conspicuous in the history of mankind. How strong it is, let the

sculptured monuments of Asia and Egypt and Central America — let this mighty magic which it has created, the Art of Printing — bear witness. How manifestly native, by the way, to an immortal nature, is the forever repeated effort to provide for its memories imperishable shapes !

But to proceed. The form which the written notices of Jesus first took, as it was likely to be the most faithful, so was it the form which it is most likely they would keep ; not at the first through any of the superstitious reverence for the letter which has since so long protected it from change, and which the letter could hardly have inspired so long as there were living depositaries of the facts, but because the people, among whom those primitive documents circulated, could not have been practised in the arts of composition, and their unskilled fingers were not likely to tamper with the letter of those early scriptures. It was enough if they were able to read them. The art of writing in those days, and especially among the classes to which the first Christians for the most part belonged, must have been far from being either common or facile. As the events of the life of Jesus — which, had they occurred now when the implements of this art are so powerful and so abundant, would have been printed and pub-

lished all over the world in four-and-twenty hours after their occurrence, and in a variety of shapes — passed with difficulty into a written form in that age, so, when once they had got shape in writing, it must needs have been felt, under the many and obvious difficulties of the case, to be a triumph; and as there was no literary skill to create variety, these early accounts would not be likely to undergo any changes or alterations but such trivial ones as were caused accidentally and without intention; especially so long as they were valued simply as records of fact, and not as authorities for doctrine, and before opinions began to appear in such strength as to create sects and the consequent temptation to wrest a warrant from these writings for partisan views.

Such writings, circulating more or less widely, becoming, as time passed and the number of the immediate actors in those wonderful scenes was lessening, more and more valuable, what could be more in the course of things than that they should tend to unite in something like orderly narratives? That is, when any person had obtained copies of one or more of these writings, he would naturally desire to possess others, and so things tended to the formation and appearance of the Gospels, as we now have

them. In some instances, where small societies of believers had only occasional opportunities of hearing about Christ, we can readily suppose that these memoranda would be regarded with special interest. Or, as Luke was moved in part to prepare his work for his friend Theophilus, so a desire on the part of persons here and there to communicate to distant friends some information respecting events so interesting would lead to the composition and compilation of these accounts. The probable circumstances that would cause writings of this description to be prepared, collected, and preserved are many and various.

Thus gradually taking the form in which they have now for long centuries become fixed, those names (I refer now to the first three Gospels alone) were at some early period affixed to them — Matthew's and Mark's especially — that seemed to belong to them, either from the fact that from those persons had been more or less directly derived the larger or the most important portions of them, or because Matthew and Mark had severally given these writings the sanction of their authority, or from some other and even slighter reason. Luke's Gospel bears evident marks of having been made up in this manner, from materials previously exist-

ing, prepared to his hand, and already having greater or less circulation. From these he was qualified to make a selection by the opportunities he had had of personal intercourse with those who knew. And sometimes, it is evident also, he put his materials together without any connection, or according to his own notion of their connection. See, by way of obvious instances in point, the twelfth chapter of his Gospel, from the forty-ninth verse to the fifty-ninth inclusive,¹ and the last two verses of the fourteenth chapter, evidently disconnected passages, mere fragments, which might as well have been introduced elsewhere. At all events, the names connected with the first three Gospels respectively were not affixed to them arbitrarily. There must have been some positive reason for attributing them to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, otherwise names of higher authority would have been selected. It is not necessary to suppose, I would have it understood, that Matthew wrote with his own hand, or dictated, the whole of the Gospel which bears his name, or Mark the whole of his, or even Luke the whole of his. The Four Gospels are manifestly, in great part, com-

¹ The passage, contained in the 54th to the 57th verse inclusive, belongs to the occasion on which the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign. See Matt. xvi. 1-3.

pilations of sketches previously prepared, but not throughout, by the hands of those whose names they now bear. The Evangelists so called were not such practised writers that they would be likely to write over again what was already written to their hands, and what they knew from authentic sources to be substantially true.

Indeed, when all the probable circumstances are considered, it will not seem unlikely that substantial portions of the first three Gospels had no authors, no authors who thought of being known as such, no authors whose names could carry any authority, or who had any purpose beyond the simple one, that must naturally have arisen in many minds, of preserving in an enduring form the memory of events so remarkable. In fine, I can easily conceive that, in their primitive forms, these histories appeared and went abroad somewhat in the way in which certain popular sayings and songs appear and spread far and wide, nobody knows whence, by an irresistible force of nature answering some new want, expressive of some new mode of thought or humor, and of course representative of a natural truth.

When the Gospels first began to circulate in these incipient shapes, there were numbers living who were already familiar with their

contents, and able to judge concerning their authenticity from having heard them before from competent persons. Accordingly we may understand how it was that the multiplication of these writings was likely to be limited by their truth. Some few documents of a fabulous character may have become incorporated with them, but not many. The publicity and general knowledge of the main facts would naturally operate as a check upon their indefinite increase. And gradually, as the number of those who had more or less direct knowledge of the facts which they narrate became less,—in other words, as the generation to whom the facts were thus known was passing away,—not only would these original records rise in value, but any new ones that might appear, lacking the voucher of a previous general acceptance, would be regarded with distrust, and be refused admission among the received histories.

It must be borne in mind, however, that writings of either description, true or false, could not have multiplied in those days with anything like the rapidity of modern times. The world was not then in possession of the printing-press, nor was it overrun, as it is now, with ready writers. It was not a world of books, like the world in which we are living. Very far from

it. In the absence of what we call education among those who first embraced Christianity, and of all facilities of publication, it could have been only with extreme difficulty that an account of Christ got published at all; and nothing explains the fact that such a history was published, but the intrinsic and irresistible force of its truth. And it must be borne in mind, that, while its truth rendered its publication as certain as the rising of the sun, its publication was necessarily, under the circumstances, a very slow process. Copies could have been multiplied, not as now by thousands at once, but only one by one. There could have been no public announcement of their existence. And they could have had at the first little value, save in the eyes of those who knew or believed them to be true, as there was neither any facility of composition and publication to generate factitious interests, nor any great demand for writings of any sort. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the Christians increased at the first with extraordinary rapidity. At the time of the great conflagration of Rome, only about thirty years after the death of Christ, a vast multitude of them, "*multitudo ingens*," as Tacitus informs us, was found in that far-off city. Still Christianity was not made

off-hand ; it grew, and all growth is gradual ; and before it began to harden into shape, before its friends became a denomination,¹ or partisan aims began to alloy their faith and tempt them to resort to questionable means of advancing their cause, there could hardly have existed the temptation to fabricate stories, which betrayed itself subsequently in the apocryphal Gospels, in the Gospel of the Infancy, for example, which shows its spurious origin in the prominence given in it to one of the then germi-

¹ The disciples were not known by the name of Christians until some ten years after the death of Christ (Acts xi. 26) ; a name which, as it was given them, not assumed by them, had at the first none but opprobrious associations. As it was popularly regarded as a disgraceful name, the disciples, I imagine, could not have been in any haste to accept it. The Apostles and the earliest Christian writers do not use it. It is found only once in the Epistles, and then the connection indicates that it was regarded as a term of reproach (1 Pet. iv. 16). The Apostle Paul appears to me to have shunned it when arraigned before Agrippa. Upon the king's exclaiming, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian!" (which, by the way, is pretty much the same as if, upon a supposed like occasion, some few years ago, some one of our pro-slavery dignitaries, numerous then, now happily growing scarce, had exclaimed, "Almost thou persuadest me to be an Abolitionist!") Paul's rejoinder sounds to me as if he had said, "I do not know nor care about what you call being a Christian, I only know that I would to God that you and all present were, not only almost, but altogether, such as I am!" The title even of Christian must have had to Paul's ears a narrow and repulsive sound, apart from its opprobrious character. So I judge from 1 Cor. i. 12.

nating dogmas of the Church, which has only in these latter days, in the formal declaration of the Immaculate Conception, flowered out into full bloom,—the worship of the Virgin Mary.

The origin of the Christian Records, which I have thus endeavored to trace, is probable from its naturalness, and from its striking coincidence with the indifference to the letter to which I alluded in the beginning as characteristic of Jesus; and it enables us to see how it happens that the accounts we have of him are brief and fragmentary, and, such as they ultimately became, were not prepared, as we should naturally at first sight expect, by his nearest friends, but by persons standing comparatively at a distance from him, such as Mark and Luke, who were not among his personal disciples. Neither Jesus, nor his first disciples, filled as they were with the Spirit, made any movement towards providing a literary vehicle for the truth. Only after a while, as the ardor of expectation with which the future was looked to began to cool, did the truth begin to crystallize into an historical form; and the earliest names that gave it authority in this shape were names holding a comparatively subordinate

place, Mark and Luke and Matthew. As the spirit, fed no longer or in a diminished degree by the excitement of that fond Jewish hope, began to languish, the letter of the Past rose in importance. And when a higher name appears, the name of John, in connection with a written declaration of facts, it is after a considerable interval, and under circumstances which give to John's Gospel a character peculiar, but by no means inconsistent with its high historical value.

For the foregoing account of the probable manner in which the Gospels—I speak of the first three particularly—came into existence, I do not make any claim on the score of absolute novelty. That our present Gospels are composed of documents previously existing, is a theory familiar to Biblical critics. I only submit that the view which I have taken is obvious and natural. It might be fortified in substance, were such confirmation necessary, by the authority of distinguished names, Neander's, for example. But I prefer to look for the corroboration of it in the Gospels themselves. These, to some extent at least, authorize the suggestions that have been made, by certain peculiarities in their spirit and structure, the most

marked of which is what may be termed their Impersonality.

Every reader must have been struck with the absence of personal coloring in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in large portions of John's Gospel even. They are strongly impressed with the marks of a certain period, of Jewish modes of expression and of thought. But beyond this, they seem to be the works of writers destitute of all personal opinions and feelings in regard to the subject in hand. There is not the slightest effort apparent to reconcile the things attributed to Jesus, nor do they hint a word of favorable explanation. They seem to have had no object or views which prompt their authors so much as to think what the bearings may be of the facts which they narrate. For all that appears, it is hardly possible to say whether the persons who wrote these things down were friends or strangers, mere lookers-on, — some curious observer of the class of the Jewish scribes, perhaps, less bigoted than the generality of his brethren.

This peculiarity indicates at least, most satisfactorily, the absence of all partisan motives leading to the composition of these writings, of all purposes in their authors inconsistent with a simple desire to state the truth. But it shows

more than this. It intimates the absence, not only of any design that would create distrust, but of all those natural feelings of favor and admiration with which the subject was so powerfully fitted to prepossess the mind, and which manifest themselves irrepressibly in all other biographies that have ever been written. It is not easy, therefore, to reconcile the passionless character of these compositions with the idea that they were written throughout by persons, ardent friends of Jesus, who set themselves deliberately to communicate to the world their own sense of his greatness and their own faith in him upon whom, in the Epistles, the most exalted terms are so naturally and so copiously lavished. Had the work been undertaken with such a purpose, — with a view, for instance, to convince those outside the growing body of disciples, — is it likely or natural that it would have been done with so marked an absence of all personal feeling? The fourth Gospel, John's, was avowedly written with a particular design, to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, and consequently has less of the impersonality so conspicuous in the other Gospels.¹

But suppose the Gospels to have come into existence and to have taken form in the way

¹ John xxi. 31.

that I have endeavored to describe ; suppose that incidents of the life of Jesus were told by one to another, as such things must have been told, for their own sakes, merely on account of their remarkableness, with no reference, no formal view, to a life of him or to the furtherance of his truth, not at all as arguments to produce conviction, but only as things wonderful for their wisdom and power, from no feeling but such a lively sense of truth as such things must have created, and that, being thus told, they passed almost insensibly into written shapes and so became fixed ; then the apparent absence of all desire to heighten their effect, of all concern for their credibility, — in short, the impersonality, which characterizes these writings, is very natural, and in keeping with the manner of their origin which I suggest.

We are accustomed to speak as if the immediate disciples of Jesus were the only persons who could have had any interest in reporting his acts and sayings. But the things that he said and did were said and done, in great part, in the presence, not of the twelve alone, but of great crowds of people, among whom there were numbers, doubtless, who, so far as the ability to relate what they saw and heard was concerned, were as competent to that work as

the disciples themselves, and even more so. And when it is considered what his acts and sayings were, how essentially true and great, how powerfully fitted to impress deeply the minds of all who looked and listened with the least degree of ingenuousness, it will not appear probable that his few professed followers were the only persons who were moved to tell what they had seen and heard. To us the facts of his life are familiar, trite. But think what they must have been at the time, new, fresh, and full of power. Reports of his words and deeds, phenomena so novel and at the same time speaking with such unprecedented force to the deepest in man,—the story of them must have gone abroad from thousands of lips, from the persons whom he healed, healed too with such an impressive simplicity of manner, or to whom or in whose hearing those great things were said, and from their friends; and so for a while, and to a wide extent, these reports must have been as familiar as household words.¹ The country far and wide must have been full of unwritten gospels. How much must have been actually told, when there was so much to be told that it stands written as the conclusion of the fourth Gospel that, if everything that Jesus

¹ Matt. iv. 24 ; Luke vii. 17.

did should be written, the world itself could not contain the books that must be written! Many of these reports, no doubt, gradually died away, and disappeared altogether in the course of time, but not the most striking and important. These survived because they were striking and important, and had strength to live; although, at the same time, it is not impossible that, owing to special circumstances, incidents of very considerable interest may not have found a hand to record them as soon as other events of less moment. It may be thus that the absence of any notice of the Raising of Lazarus in the first three Gospels is to be accounted for. However this may be, nothing can well be easier to imagine than that the accounts thus given of Jesus, and thus put into circulation,—not by formal design, but by the natural agency of those human emotions which his career awakened,—should, in the course of time, take shape in writing, and this, too, a considerable time perhaps before any of his nearest friends thought of giving them this form. Regarding the substantial contents of the first three Gospels as having thus come into being, more like natural productions than artificial compositions, we perceive how it happens that they are so singularly destitute of personal coloring.

Another peculiarity of the Gospels, akin to the foregoing, and accordant with the views here presented of their origin, is their great simplicity, almost rudeness, as shown in the artlessness of their construction and in their slight sketchy character. They presume upon the knowledge of the reader. They take it for granted that he sees all that they see. So that the significance of the events related is often a matter of inference. They tell the story as a child would tell it, omitting oftentimes important particulars, and yet telling what they tell in such a way as to imply what is not mentioned. There is no varying of phrases, nor any appearance of rhetorical facility. Looking only at their literary structure, we should judge them to be the works of persons into whose minds it would never have entered to write at all, if they had not been moved thereto by the same strong natural impulse to express what they had seen and heard, that moves us all to communicate what we know; persons who, so far from having any view to effect, or any facility of composition, sought only to put the things that burned in their minds into some kind of literary shape, and, when they had once accomplished it, never dreamed of improvement or correction; persons who had no idea of what they were

doing, or of the value that was thereafter to be attached to every syllable of their records. Had they distinctly proposed to themselves—had they only surmised even—the likelihood that their writings were to be held sacred for centuries, it is impossible that the whole style and structure of these books should not have shown traces that such was their thought. Instead of the careless simplicity that pervades them, how could they have avoided betraying an almost painful constraint? They never could have been constructed so artlessly.

Neither the authors of these primitive records, nor those among whom they first circulated, had any knowledge of writing as an art. They were content with the first and simplest modes of speech that came to mind. They evidently belong to times and conditions corresponding to the Pre-Raphaelite period in the art of painting, when men used the art hardly knowing that there was such a thing, employing it merely for the sake of expression, rudely enough, but from the impulse of a religious sentiment insisting upon being expressed. Hence it comes, that, composed not only in ignorance of the art of composition, but with a sole desire to relate the events recorded, these writings are the simplest possible, abounding in primitive forms of

language, and in the scenic mode of narration which belongs to the early period in the art of written composition, before it becomes conscious of itself, or attains to any facility or refinement in diversifying its methods.

There is yet another characteristic of the first three Gospels which helps to give color to this view of their origin. They appear not only to be put together without any special reference to the order of time, but the different parts are often entirely without any connection whatever. They readily fall apart into separate pieces, each of which is a whole by itself, an account of some one remarkable incident. Take, for example, that portion of these records which gives us the striking answers returned by Jesus to three different persons who offered to join him.¹ It is not necessary to suppose that these persons came to him all at once, in the order in which these incidents stand in the history. It is not likely that the second proffered his service immediately after the rebuff the first met with. It is more natural — the fragmentary character of these writings being taken into view — to suppose that these several offers were made upon different occasions, at different times. Each one of his replies is memorable, a word

¹ Matt. viii. 18 - 22; Luke ix. 56 - 62.

of wisdom by itself. The report of it ran into circulation by itself. It could not but be remembered and repeated, and at last recorded. It was a thing to tell. It had force to live and speak. And then it was equally natural that these three similar anecdotes should come together in their present connection.

As, before we can decide whether a man be telling the truth, we must understand what it is that he says, so, before we can determine how a history came to be, we must first know what its contents actually are. When, therefore, we distinctly represent to ourselves the events which constitute the substance of the Gospels, — of the first three especially, — it seems not merely probable, but absolutely necessary, that they should have come into being somewhat in the way which I have described: more by force of truth and nature than by forethought and design. But the important truth is, that the nature of the facts reported has never been fairly taken into account. Indeed, it cannot even be said to have been so much as understood. Much learning has been employed in attempts to explore the origin and early history of the Gospels, but with no satisfactory results; and for the reason that, in the investi-

gation of this subject, *the actual truth of the main contents of these books has never yet been fairly supposed*. In a word, the hypothesis of their historical truth has never been faithfully applied to them. And this again for the best of reasons: there has been no correct idea of what the facts are. They have not been distinctly apprehended as pure historical facts, and as such to be substantiated in the only way in which any facts in history are substantiated. How is it possible fairly to suppose the historical truth of events which are not so much as conceived of as simple matters of history, but are, and always have been, treated either as positive supernatural deviations from historical order on the one hand, or as exaggerations or fables on the other? We cannot make the supposition that an event is true, without supposing that, in some way or another, although not immediately apparent, it is in keeping with all events. This is, indeed, what is meant, and it is the only thing that can be meant, by supposing the historical truth of any fact. It is to presume that it is reconcilable with the whole truth of things. This, I say, is the supposition that has never yet been made in the case of the four Gospels. Mistaken views of the nature of their contents have rendered it impossible. What

with the old miraculous theory on the one hand, and the new mythical theory on the other, there has been no room or thought given to a purely historical theory.

The firmest ground reached by so eminent a theologian as De Wette in regard to the miracles, as most of the events of the life of Jesus are termed, is the thin theory of their "ideal-symbolic meaning." As to the possibility of their being believed now as they were believed at the first, after confessing that he is "by no means strong in the faith," he remarks: "That in which, whatever may be their views of the miracles, all may unite, is their ideal-symbolic significance, to which I have here and there alluded, without intending to maintain that the narratives of the miracles are woven together merely out of ideas." And he proceeds to define "the genuine historical faith" to be "a sound, substantial¹ moral faith, which, upon the basis of the historico-ecclesiastical Communion (*auf der Grundlage der historisch-kirchlichen Gemeinschaft*), holds fast the principle that the spirit, which has become the life of the modern

¹ These epithets may well create a suspicion that the writer was conscious of a lack of soundness and substance in the definition of an historical faith which he is about to propose, as well he might have been, seeing that it is no historical faith at all as he defines it.

world, has its source in the personality of Christ, and that he is the creator of our religious life"; which definition is equivalent to saying that a genuine historical faith in the personal existence of Christ rests, not directly upon his personal history, but upon the existence and history of the Church: a virtual confession that the writer neither had any perception, nor supposed it possible to have any, of the intrinsic truth of the history of Christ himself.¹

Of what avail have been the labors of the learned men of former times in investigating and establishing the historical claims of the Gospels, when they were bound hand and foot both by the idea of their preternatural origin and character, which forbids them to be treated like all other books, and by the belief that the things of which they tell were out of the course of human history, and consequently out of the way of being verified in the only manner in which any historical fact can be verified? How could they possibly succeed in demonstrating the historical truth of writings which they held to be positively unhistorical both in their structure and in their contents? Thus clogged by false theories, inquiry could make no approach to the

¹ *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* von Dr. W. M. L. de Wette. Preface to First Ed.

truth in regard to the Gospels. Neither could any progress in that direction be made by recent Biblical critics, such as Strauss and others, who maintain, as the result of their investigations, that, so far from being miraculously inspired, and on that account entitled to be received as true, the Gospels cannot even be received as pure human histories even, — that they are a mere collection of myths, not historical compositions at all. Looking upon them in this light, these critics have directed all their ingenuity and learning to the point of determining, not how far the Gospels are histories, but to what extent they are fables. Of course, when the aim is to make good this theory, small is the prospect that any justice will be done to their historical character.

But the mythical theory concerning the Gospels carries in itself the means of its own refutation. So far from dispensing with the obligation of inquiring into their historical character, it renders it only the more binding. It renders only the more pertinent the question, Have not these writings, then, any historical pretensions? And if they have, — if they are, to any degree, however small, historical, to what degree they are so is a point to be decided; and it can be decided only by examining them as histories.

Is it affirmed that they are wholly fabulous? Still there is need of the historical hypothesis, inasmuch as they not only still have in their general structure and on the face of them the look of histories, but, their fabulous character being conceded to the utmost, there must have been some cause for their fables, some basis of historical fact upon which this fabulous fabric was reared.

Myths are they? Mere collections of wonder-born fancies? How, in the name of common sense, came such a cloud of phantom facts to appear at the time they did, and to show, amidst all their variations, such an extraordinary unity as they do, and to be connected, as they were, with a movement, than which none more imposing has ever occurred in the history of mankind? I presume it will not be questioned that they have been received from the first, not as fables, but as narratives of actual facts. What made them to be so received, and the reception of them to be connected with such marked changes in personal character and in the course of human history? It takes something more forcible than fiction to produce such effects, or, if delusion be as potent as truth, then are the most vital distinctions confounded. There must have been some foundation of fact then, more

or less broad, — some germ of historical truth, more or less vigorous, — out of which these writings, whatever they are supposed to be, grew, and by which they were rendered credible, and made to produce such palpable fruits.

Thus the mythical theory itself leads us to see how impossible it is to account fully for the existence of the Gospels, or to seek, with any hope of success, for the sources whence they sprung, without giving some weight to the presumption that, in some sense, limited as it may be, they are histories; in a word, without recognizing reality, fact, as at least having some share in their origin. Let it be that they have so much of a legendary look that we are fully justified in testing the truth of the legendary theory to the uttermost, and in attempting to ascertain how far it will carry us towards a satisfactory explanation of their existence as a purely literary phenomenon. But after we have plied this theory to its utmost extent, there still remains the question of their historical claims, which the legendary theory, so far from precluding or answering, is itself, as we have just seen, a reason for asking, a question which can only be settled by trying the hypothesis that the Gospels are histories, and seeking to discover how far this will work out for us the problem

in hand. This supposition must needs have a very material influence upon the conclusions that we reach. It leads us to attend to considerations which a preconceived idea of the mythical character of the Gospels, and a predominating desire to substantiate that, dispose us to overlook.

And the first thing to which we shall be induced to give more careful heed, and which will tend to confirm the presumption of the historical truth of the Gospels, is their obvious historical structure. Let it be that many of the things narrated wear at first sight a fabulous look, there is, nevertheless, in these writings a prodigal occurrence of allusions to familiar names, times, and places.¹ The particulars stated are interwoven

¹ Even M. Renan, to whom so much of the New Testament is mythical, tells us that it was the profound impression made on him by the geographical truth of that history that moved him to write his *Life of Jesus*. It seemed to him, — but let him speak for himself. The passage is striking, the testimony most weighty. "I have visited Jerusalem, Hebron, and Samaria. Hardly has an important locality of the history of Jesus escaped me. All this history, which at a distance seems to float in the mists of a world without reality, in this way took a body, a solidity, which amazed me; the striking agreement of texts and places, the marvellous harmony of the Gospel ideal with the country which serves as its frame, were to me as a revelation. I had before my eyes a fifth Gospel, mutilated, but still legible, and thenceforth, through the narratives of Matthew and Mark, in the place of an abstract being, who, one might say, never had an existence, I saw moving an admirable human figure." (*Vie de Jésus*, Introd.,

naturally, and with a remarkable minuteness, with well known and probable circumstances. So abundantly is this the case, so obvious is the narrative style and form of the Gospels, that it is in these very historical peculiarities that the advocates of the mythical theory have sought and professed to find the evidence of the little value of these writings as histories. The discrepancies in which they abound have been set forth in formidable array against their historical credibility. Here indeed the main objections to their truth have been planted. And these objections have been urged as if they must needs be fatal, and as if the worth of a history depended solely, or chiefly even, upon its verbal accuracy and the correctness of its dates.

Now it is of great importance to consider that a history may be very imperfect in these respects, and yet throw great light upon the events which it relates. It is not by any means in its strict circumstantial accuracy alone that the value of a history consists.¹ Before we are at liberty to

p. liii., Septième éd.) Surely the historical claims of writings whose local truth is thus striking, deserve most careful consideration.

¹ "That man reads history or anything else, at great peril of being thoroughly misled, who has no perception of any truthfulness except that which can be fully ascertained by reference to facts." — *Friends in Council*.

throw it aside as worthless, we must first fairly suppose its truth, in order to determine, by this supposition, what amount of accuracy we have a right, in reason and under the circumstances, to expect. While the errors of a history may arise from ignorance and carelessness, from credulity or a fraudulent purpose, these are very far from being the only sources of error. The facts related, the facts themselves, may be intrinsically of such a character, and such and so intimate may have been the historian's relation to them, that, even although he were thoroughly honest and of unquestioned intelligence, it would be unreasonable to demand of him absolute correctness. The truth itself may have been the occasion of his mistakes through the mental disturbance which it caused, and his mistakes, having this origin, become evidences of the truth of the strongest possible kind, because they are evidences furnished without intention.¹

¹ A very striking illustration of the truth of these remarks is furnished us in Matthew's account of the resurrection of Jesus. As I have already observed (Chap. VII. p. 208), Matthew's account, taken by itself, allows no space of time for Jesus to rise and come out from the tomb. So that, were it not for the other accounts, which elucidate Matthew's account and disclose its value, we should hold ourselves justified in rejecting it at once as absurd in itself. And yet, taken in connection with the other accounts, it is found to be just such a story as would naturally have been told, and to be of great value as furnishing evidence

A history, therefore, I repeat, is not to be at once condemned as unworthy of credit on account of the inconsistencies, or what seem to be inconsistencies, that appear in it. We must try to discover how and whence they came. We must see whether they were not occasioned by its truth. Whether they were so produced or not, we never can ascertain but by supposing the history to be substantially true, in a word, to be a history, and seeing how well it stands the test of this supposition.

And this, in the case of the Gospels, we are specially justified in supposing by one remarkable feature of these books, and that is, the moral consistency by which they are pervaded, and which necessarily and very strongly implies their truth.

Here is a characteristic of the Gospels, which they who lay so much stress upon their discrepancies seem very little disposed to regard. They overlook it altogether; partly, it may be, from a constitutional inability to appreciate it, but chiefly from the blindness, naturally produced, to whatever does not accord with the

the most powerful, because wholly unintentional, to the reality of the main fact. Thus are we admonished to take care how we reject a narrative as worthless merely because it shows discrepancies on the face of it, discrepancies that may have been occasioned by the truth.

views to which they are committed. In the recent works which, maintaining the mythical character of the Gospels, virtually labor to overthrow their historical authority, there is scarce any recognition—in Theodore Parker's "Discourse of Religion," not the slightest—of this inner harmony of the events related, each with itself, with one another, and with all the facts of nature. And yet there is nothing pertaining to the Gospels more remarkable. It is so pervading and so fine that, when once clearly perceived, nothing seems more reasonable than to be guided in the examination of these writings by the presumption of their truth, whatever, at first sight, may appear to the contrary. Let it be that it is impossible to straighten out their contents into anything like an orderly series of events, that difficulties present themselves that resist every attempt at solution,—still, in and all through them runs a certain harmony which we instinctively feel can belong only to reality. Although very little has as yet been done to bring prominently into view this feature of the Gospels, and that little has been regarded as hardly anything more than the fabrication of a somewhat vivid fancy,—although the harmony of which I speak has been and still lies hidden under a mass of false interpretations and huge

structures of dogmatic theology, "covered with the awful hoar of innumerable ages," — yet I am persuaded that it is a perception, or rather strong feeling, in the general mind, of the interior harmony of this wondrous history, which maintains it in the faith of men a substantial fact, undisturbed by the frequently repeated and most skilful attempts of ingenious and learned men to resolve it all into air.

What renders this internal consistency the more impressive is, that it is found in connection with so much circumstantial carelessness. While it is difficult to disentangle the actual facts, there is everywhere apparent, when these writings are rightly taken, a naturalness that indicates the breathing presence of truth; and not only so, it is the key that unlocks the mystery. It is the clew whereby the involved narrative is to be unravelled.

And what is still further noteworthy is the fact that this moral harmony appears not only in those parts of these books that relate nothing unusual, but nowhere more strikingly than in most of the very passages which, at first sight, wear a strong mythical look. I know no part of the Gospels that we might be more inclined, on the face of it, to suspect to be a fabulous or allegorical statement, than the brief account of

the Baptism of Jesus. Most assuredly no passage of the history seems at first sight to be less reconcilable with the truth of things. And yet, fabulous as it looks, in the very forms of expression employed in this passage I trace the harmony of the particulars with each other, and with the laws of the human soul. Suppose the central fact of the baptism of Jesus, and it becomes, when all the circumstances of the case are considered, not a far-fetched conjecture, but a necessary inference, that such a state of mind must have been his at that high moment, that era in his spiritual life, as absolutely necessitated the employment of such forms of speech as actually are employed to describe his experience on that occasion.

I pray the reader to ponder this instance well. So strong is the disposition at the present day to cast doubts upon the Gospels considered as credible histories, with so much acuteness and learning has it been attempted to undermine their historical authority, and so little has been done to cause their intrinsic truth to be seen, save in defensive resistance to such attempts, that it is not at all easy to keep a perfectly fair mind, unswayed by any bias unfavorable to a perception of the actual truth. It is difficult to weigh the contents of the Gospels with free-

dom, and at the same time with candor, with a single eye to their intrinsic truth. But although it is difficult, it is not impossible.

I ask attention to the instance adduced in illustration of these views, not because it furnishes us with an argument against the mythical theory,—although such an argument it certainly does furnish,—but for the sake of its own simple truth. Suppose then, I repeat, that Jesus observed the rite of baptism. No extravagant supposition, certainly, but a perfectly reasonable one when the considerations already referred to (see Chap. III.) are allowed their due weight. Is it fanciful or is it not a necessary inference that he observed it, as I have stated, with the deepest emotion? Must it not have been to him an occasion of soul-searching power, a new experience, stirring him to the inmost then when he was solemnly giving himself up without reserve to an early and terrible doom? And if so, if it were what I have represented it to be, was it not one of the great moments in his great life, nay, one of those transcendent events in the natural history of the human spirit, which could not be let die? Could he himself have refrained from speaking of it afterwards? Considering what he was, what was his extraordinary character, how grand his being was and

his purpose, can we not readily suppose him speaking of this wonderful experience, even as he spoke of the temptations by which it was followed, to some one or more of his personal disciples? Must he not have spoken of it with looks and tones of feeling and with a vividness of representation so impressive that those to whom he spoke of it could as little keep from telling it again? And when he related it, how could he have described his emotions in a more natural way than that in which they now stand described forever? With the new and ecstatic sense of the exalted truth of his position, which opened upon him then as never before, since never before had he been moved to take the great irrevocable step he was taking then, with his mental vision undimmed by any lingering shadow of hesitation, and being then, as he was, in profound harmony with the ineffable Light and Peace, how else could he describe what he felt but as heaven unveiled? And can we not further understand how the sudden and exalted consciousness of the purest truth that ever swelled the bosom of man found its expression in certain words, flashing upon his memory involuntarily, so that it seemed as if a voice spoke them to him?¹ Is there anything more com-

¹ The words spoken by the voice at the Baptism of Jesus are

mon, at a moment of extraordinary excitement, than the sudden occurrence to the mind of some brief sentence or text, of which the feeling of the moment seems to be the interpretation, and that so vividly, that it can be described only as a voice heard? And in that ecstasy, if but a common dove, the already recognized symbol of innocence and love,¹ hovered within, or only flitted across the sphere of his rapt vision, could Jesus have helped interpreting such an apparition at such a moment as a visible and beatific sign of the approving God? So transfigured was the bird, in his eye, that it lost its ordinary appearance, and with the perfect truth of nature it is described, not as a dove, but only as *like* a dove. When an alleged apparition is reported as resembling some common object, the probable surmise is that it actually is that object divested of its familiar appearance and putting on a preternatural aspect through the

evidently a quotation from the Old Testament (Ps. ii. 7 ; Is. xlii. 1). This alone would suffice to show that the account of what occurred on that occasion is a description of what passed in the mind of Christ; as the Almighty can hardly be worthily conceived of as quoting Scripture.

¹ According to Strauss, the dove was a sacred bird in the East, and especially in Syria. All that Strauss has to say, by the way, of the opening of the heavens at the baptism of Jesus is, that this was a circumstance needed to provide a way of egress for the dove, and so to complete the myth.

force of an excited imagination. Does not history abound in similar interpretations of ordinary appearances on exciting occasions? Whence come omens and portents, but in accordance with what thus seems to be a law of the human mind?

The consistency which this passage shows with the laws of the spirit pervades the Gospels. It is especially traceable in the accounts of the Raising of Lazarus, of the closing scenes of the life of Jesus, and in the narratives of his resurrection. In this last case we have a very striking example of the manner in which a perception of the truth and naturalness underlying the story helps us to disentangle and arrange in due order the different parts of the story, otherwise hopelessly confused.

I have specified two or three passages in the Gospels. But to show the propriety of presupposing their historical truth, and of working out the supposition faithfully, if we hope to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to their origin, I might content myself with pointing to the one grand fact of the consistent idea of Jesus himself, formed into a personal whole, from these collections of anecdotes, these *memorabilia*, as they have been truly termed. Out of these artlessly constructed, imperfectly connected writ-

ings, with all their circumstantial discrepancies and legendary aspects, emerges the central figure of a person than whom the world knows no one more thoroughly original and more thoroughly natural, no one in whom the greatest qualities more harmoniously meet. This is the fact that vindicates the historical authority of the four Gospels, and bids us take care, as we value Heaven's choicest truth, how we lightly put them aside as mere compilations of fables. This is the fact that waits for explanation from the advocates of the mythical theory, who have to show how, from a crude collection of fables, such a result is obtained, — how an idea, in the most important respects so novel and yet so consistent with itself and with all true ideas, can be thus derived. And not only so, it must be shown how it happens, if the Gospels are not true, that their internal consistency, being once perceived, helps us in so many instances so effectually to account for and to reconcile their discrepancies and to substantiate their truth.

For the sake of clearness, let me recapitulate what has now been said.

The question is, Whence and how came the first three Gospels? In order to see how natural it is that their origin should have been such as

I have sketched in the first part of this chapter, it is necessary to take into view the nature of their contents. In a word, their historical truth must be fairly supposed. This, I affirm, for the reason which I have stated, has not been done by those who ascribe to the Gospels a miraculous character, and of course not by those who treat them as fables. The aim of critics of the class of Strauss, Hennell, Parker, and others, has been to show, not to what extent the Gospels are veritable histories, but to what extent they are fabulous; not to establish the truth they may contain, but to show them to be mythical. But the mythical theory itself presupposes some basis of fact. There must have been something which gave rise to these fables. If the Gospel narratives are fabulous, how came they ever to be received as facts? They certainly were so received. And the reception of them was accompanied and followed by changes, in individuals and in communities, of the most thorough description. There must have been, therefore, some ground of fact on which these fables rested, and which disposed people to believe them. We are led then to ascertain, if we may, how far the Gospels are true. Instead of setting out with the idea that they are fabulous, and endeavoring to make that idea

good, pressing learning and philosophy into the service, we must begin with supposing them to be historically true, and, notwithstanding the defects they may show, endeavor to discover to what extent they are so. As we analyze them in order to discover the fables which they may contain, we must take similar pains to distinguish the facts which they relate. Having this aim in view, we shall note the historical features they present, and it will become us to consider that the value of an historical work does not depend only on its circumstantial accuracy. Its discrepancies, many and obvious though they may be, do not necessarily imply either ignorance or fraud. They may have for their cause the substantial truth of the events narrated, which may be of such a nature as to have led its author into error, even although he were of unquestionable honesty and intelligence, and then, in this case, his errors may be the most decisive evidences possible of the truth. To decide the worth of a history, then, we must test the hypothesis of its truth. And this hypothesis we are warranted in adopting, and faithfully applying to the Gospels, by the wonderful moral consistency by which, amidst their obvious discrepancies, they are marked, and which is an invariable accompaniment of truth.

I proceed now to remark, that as, by going on the presumption of the truth of the Gospels, we shall be led to a satisfactory sense of their historical value, and learn to estimate aright and to reconcile their discrepancies, so, obtaining a clearer understanding of the nature of the facts they narrate, we shall begin to see how it was that, surely although slowly, they took their present shape, and were thus published. We shall see that such events had, by the very necessity of their nature, to pass into some such forms; that the things said and done by Jesus could not but make such an impression as would demand to be reported and published in every way possible. The great reason, be it remembered, why we fail to perceive that the existence of these writings was a sheer necessity, is that we do not distinctly conceive the nature of their contents. And consequently we do not see how events so real and so original, and at the same time so striking, as the acts and words of the man of Nazareth, were bound to be told. These things are so feebly apprehended by us, that it never occurs to us to consider the impression they must have made at the time. Notwithstanding the great differences between that age and ours, human nature was the same then as now. We forget this simple fact, and

do not allow for the effects of the impression made by the appearance of such a person as Jesus. Accordingly, the living connection between his life and these histories of his life is not discerned. We do not see how directly these grew out of that. Histories of this kind had to appear, supposing the things related to be true.

Such facts as make up the life of Jesus, new but yet natural, most impressive exponents of eternal truths, the embodiment of the highest things and the deepest, the world would not, could not let die. Human nature and all nature, by their very constitution, were in such affinity to them, so amply pledged to perpetuate the memory of them, and so certain were such events to find or to create the means of publication, that the whole matter could be safely left, as it was, to take care of itself. The air is not more truly made for the transmission of light and sound than this world of ours is to immortalize the main incidents of such a life. The idea that a preternatural dictation of the Holy Spirit was necessary in order to preserve a correct report of events, intrinsically of such weight as to stamp themselves ineffaceably upon the memory of man, is worse than needless. It only shows that these events have not really

been believed, or recourse never would have been had to any such superficial theories, subterfuges of a latent unbelief, that should at least have been outgrown long ago. Let the facts of the history be once rightly conceived of, and no difficulty in accounting for the way in which they have come down to us can have any power to disturb our conviction of their truth, because we see intuitively that, in one way or another, a report of them had to go forth. How they happened to be told just as they are told, in other words, how the Gospels came to be what they are, what shapes they passed through before they took the forms which they now have, is a question which, although it should continue for a long time to come to receive no satisfactory answer, can in no wise affect our confidence in the truth of their contents. It is enough that they may be clearly seen to be true in and of themselves. And then it will be seen also, that, in one way or another, they had to exist, although we may never be able to trace the precise way in which they came into existence, or to account for the peculiarities of their structure, which perplex scholars so much, and upon which so much learning and labor have been expended.

The one simple consideration which I have kept fully in view in this chapter, and which serves as a key to the secret of the origin of the Gospels as well as to so much else, is the supposition that they are substantially true; a supposition which has never been made fairly and in thorough good faith, because it could not be, so long as such notions of the facts which they narrate were entertained as rendered the facts incredible. How fully this supposition is authorized by truth and nature, appears from one interesting fact, namely this: that while of the early and middle portions of the public life of Jesus we have only a few slightly connected incidents told, of the last and most eventful scenes the narrative is wonderfully minute and complete; which is just as it should be on the supposition of the truth of the Gospels. The last hours of Jesus shone with the intense light of his godlike personality. All the force of his great character was then in action. It flamed out in one continuous manifestation, and of course burnt the record of itself into human hearts. Such fulness of moral power did he then show, that he daguerrotyped himself to the minutest detail in history. His previous career was not, and in the nature of things could not have been, equally striking. It was not till he was

thirty years old that he appeared in public. Intervals there were comparatively barren of incidents giving occasion to his greatness to manifest itself. Occasionally, for brief periods, he was withdrawn altogether from public action and speech. Accordingly, as the first thirty secluded years of his life, marked by no public evidence of his greatness, have left no written record, although he was as truly great then as afterwards, so were there seasons in his public life when nothing occurred sufficiently remarkable to be published. Only as the great spiritual life in him, which was in reserve at the first, and on many occasions of necessity latent, was brought into full activity, did it score its record on the heart of the world.

As in the way which I have now indicated we come to perceive how the Gospels came into existence, so it may be seen also why they did not make their appearance in their present shape at an earlier period. It is urged as a serious objection to their truth, that so long a space of time, thirty years or more, should have elapsed between the death of Christ and the date assigned to these records. But living, as we are, at a period in which there is hardly anything easier than publication, and the Press

stands ready to fledge every event that occurs with swift wings, we forget what a different world men lived in eighteen hundred years ago. When the difference is recollected, the wonder is, not that the life of Jesus was so long in getting published, but that it was published so soon; a wonder only to be accounted for by bearing in mind that a life, so greatly true, was bound by the invincible force of its truth to work its way into the literature of the world against all obstacles, let what would of fable gather round it and be mixed up with it, taking shape in a written form, however imperfect may have been the materials then existing therefor, or rude the hands that used them.

But apart from this general consideration, the force of the objection referred to is broken when it is borne in mind that, while events so remarkable must have taken shape in, comparatively speaking, early and fragmentary sketches, these sketches would be slow in assuming the forms which they now have, slow in attaining to the authority which they have now for centuries possessed, so long as the minds of the early disciples were filled with the idea of an entirely new order of things to be introduced by the speedy and glorious reappearance of Christ. I have already referred to the effect of this ex-

pectation in explanation of the silence of the Epistles in regard to the events of his life. It helps to explain also the tardy appearance of the Gospels in their present form. So long as the minds of the primitive disciples were occupied with the exciting idea that Christ was shortly to reappear, and that events were at hand that would eclipse all that preceded them, it was hardly possible that any thought would be taken of providing a knowledge of the past for the future. The only future that was contemplated was to be under the immediate reign of the Messiah. There was a looking for of a new heaven and a new earth filled with the splendor of that magnificent presence. The past, with all that pertained to it, was to be superseded. There was little thought of the Church and the Christianity which have followed upon that time. The organization of the first disciples as a peculiar association was of the simplest description and *pro tempore*. They could not have estimated the records of the life of Jesus at the value which they afterwards acquired, lying, as the events of his life did, behind them, in the Past made dim by the coming brightness of the near Future.

But as time wore on, and Christ did not appear, and as, moreover, the number of the disci-

ples increased and their new and peculiar modes of thought were becoming fixed, instituted, in short, were becoming a religion, there slowly took place a silent and unconscious change, a revolution, by which the future grew dim and the past rose in importance; and to the records of the past was attached a sacred authority. Thus the Gospels assumed their present forms and the position which they have now held for centuries. Had it not been so, had not a religion arisen and been established, requiring the past to authenticate it, the primitive materials of which the Gospels were formed, true and remarkable as they were, might have perished. For, as it is highly important to bear in mind, the most extraordinary things may occur, and prove no more than a nine days' wonder, unless they incorporate themselves with some continued movement or permanent institution, unless they enter in and become identified with the modes and the course of human thought. There are facts exhibited by what is termed Animal Magnetism of the most extraordinary character, facts which, however, retain no place in the general mind, because there is as yet no philosophy whereby to classify them, no theory upon which to string them.

And here is a consideration, by the way, that goes far to show how another objection brought against the truth of the Gospels is to be disposed of, the objection arising from the absence of all allusion to the events which they narrate in the literature of the time outside the Christian denomination. It is thought to be quite irreconcilable with the truth of these histories, that no notice of the extraordinary things which they relate appears in contemporaneous Pagan writings. But even putting out of sight the deep gulf of contempt which separated the people among whom Jesus appeared from all other nations, and which was so deep and strong that even Tacitus,¹ who may be supposed to have

¹ I find little difficulty in accounting for the silence of Greek and Roman writers in regard to Christ, when I pause over the language of the "profound" historian in the memorable passage of his *Annals* in which the Christians are mentioned, and gather from it some idea of the immense weight of public odium borne by the primitive disciples. When, scarcely more than thirty years after the death of Christ, the Christians were charged by Nero with being the authors of the great conflagration of Rome, which the Emperor himself was believed to have caused, Tacitus states that Nero "inflicted the most exquisite punishments on certain men, hated for their crimes, who were commonly called Christians. The leader of this denomination was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, suffered punishment under the Procurator, Pontius Pilate. Suppressed for a while, this deadly superstition broke forth again, not only over Judæa, the first seat of the evil, but over Rome, whither all things shameful and atrocious flow together and hold their revels. Those who

been as free from vulgar prejudices as any one living near that time, regarded Christianity as a deadly Jewish superstition, — making no allowance, I say, for the prejudices which would keep the Greek and Roman *literati* from concerning themselves about events that transpired in the remote and despised province of Judæa, — it is abundantly sufficient to account for their silence, to consider that no events, however extraordinary, have power to make any permanent impression on those with whose modes of thinking they possess no immediate affinity. The greatest wonders may happen, but they, or certainly the distant rumors of them, pass

were first arrested confessed," (not that they had committed the crime laid to their charge, but that they were Christians,) "and through them was discovered a great multitude, and they were convicted, not so much of the crime of setting fire to the city as for their hatred of mankind. Their dying agonies were made subjects of mockery. Some were nailed to crosses; others, sewed up in the skins of wild beasts, were torn in pieces by dogs; others again were burned alive, and used to light the darkness of the night." (The wanton cruelty with which they were treated shows how truly the Apostle Paul appreciated the position of the primitive disciples, when he said that they were regarded "as the filth and refuse of the world." They could not have been so brutally dealt with, had not the Emperor supposed them to be so utterly contemptible as to be beneath pity.) "Although the Christians," continues the Annalist, "were guilty and deserving of the severest punishment, compassion was excited, as it was felt that they were put to death not so much for the public welfare as to gratify the cruelty of one man." — *Taciti Annales*, Lib. xv. cap. 44.

like a summer cloud, unless they tally with our conscious or unconscious philosophy.¹ So long as and wherever the life of Christ was an utter anomaly in the world of thought it could arrest no earnest attention. But Christianity mightily grew, and prevailed among scholars and learned men, when it was found, or was made, to teach the Platonic, or what was held to be the Platonic philosophy. Thus working itself into the current of human thinking, it attracted notice enough. Indeed, it was not then slow in taking well-nigh exclusive possession of the literature of half a world.

It has always been held to be a point of vital importance, that the Gospels should be proved to have been written by the persons whose names they bear. But it is of little consequence who wrote them. They had to appear. And as the events they narrate did not take place in a corner, but in the presence of numbers who had eyes to see and tongues to tell things for the most part as plain as they were remarkable, it followed, as surely as effects fol-

¹ Through the glimpses that we get in the New Testament history of the Roman gentlemen of the time, we can imagine with what indifference any rumors of wonderful events coming from Judæa would be received in the polished circles of Greece and Rome. Pilate and Gallio represent a class.

low causes, that these things would be reported, and, as it became necessary, would be put into writing and circulated by every possible means of publication. There were probably very few persons then living and present on the spot, who were in any degree qualified to write the whole history of Jesus. It would have required another Christ to do that. But almost any intelligent child, who, upon any occasion, stood by and saw what Jesus did, and heard those plain words of his, uttered with the force of perfect sincerity, was able to report without difficulty what he had seen and heard. And what numbers were telling might be written down.

It is commonly thought, too, that it required persons of miraculous qualifications to record miracles. But even granting that the wonders of the life of Jesus were miracles, according to the popular sense of the term, miracles in this sense do not and cannot depend on human testimony. A man cannot testify to a miracle. He can testify to a fact. He can report the impressions made on his senses. He can tell what he has seen and heard. Whether what he reports be miraculous or not, is another question, for the solution of which he furnishes only a portion of the materials, and which is to

be decided by quite other considerations. A fact is a matter of testimony ; a miracle, a matter of opinion.¹ Now, although there may have been persons present fully competent to form opinions of what they witnessed, I should prefer, and I believe it would best secure the world's being rightly informed in regard to Jesus, that the things said and done by him should be reported by persons who were incompetent to form any but the most simple opinions of him and his acts. In almost every case, the prospect of getting at the facts must be much better through reporters able to tell the things which their eyes have seen and their ears have heard, without being disposed or able to put any construction of their own upon them, than through persons who are qualified to form opinions of the matter, and whose opinions must inevitably color their report and impair its fidelity.

It would amaze us to observe how entirely the nature and quality of the facts in this case are, in inquiries like the present, overlooked, were not the reason of it at hand, — were it not apparent that a right view of them is distorted by theories of the wonders, and indeed

¹ See "The Order of Nature considered in Reference to the Claims of Revelation," by the Rev. Baden Powell, p. 286 *et seq.*

of the whole life of Jesus, as unauthorized by the record as they are unphilosophical. From the demands that are made as to the character of the testimony by which the truth of the Gospels is to be supported, one might infer that the words of Jesus were the dark sayings of a Sphinx, or as mystical as the utterances of Paracelsus or Jacob Boehme, and that his acts were cunning feats, which only an eye long practised in observation, or specially illuminated, could distinguish. It seems hardly to be discerned, the world-wide difference there is between his acts — outspoken, self-renouncing reformer that he was, devoted friend of the misguided and spiritually oppressed masses — and the pious frauds of the priestcraft against which he contended with his whole divine soul, losing his life in the contest. I insist, in the name of the blessed faith which he has inspired, that this difference must not be overlooked. The acts of the Divine Man of Nazareth are not to be treated as if they were of a piece with the jugglery of Jewish, Egyptian, or Christian priests. It must not any longer be hidden, if we ever hope to have a just idea of the Gospels and their contents, what all the world vaguely feels, although it has never yet been worthily told, by what a peerless simplicity the life — not the mystical,

impersonal Christ that is so much talked about, but the historical life — of Jesus is characterized. In a world full of confusion and imperfection, his words and works stand out plain, grand, solid, with the grace and majesty of the architectural structures of the old world, which defy the mutilations of barbarian conquerors and the sieges of time. But I derogate from their greatness by comparing them with the grandest works of Art. They show themselves works of Nature, inimitable and imperishable. Such are the actual facts. And the records of the facts are like unto them; they were not made, they grew.

Speaking and acting in unison with the great laws of nature, the perfect will of God, Jesus spoke and acted with a divine simplicity. No one ever more so. No one ever so much. And his greatest words and works — although to this hour, like all the things of God, they have an inexhaustible significance — passed with the silent ease of God's sublimest creature, light, through the eyes and ears of those around him, into their hearts; and as easily and naturally did they pass from tongue to tongue, and at last imprint themselves on parchment and paper. There were numbers at the time as well qualified as any to report them. And it appears to me not at all impossible that very considerable

portions of our present Gospels may have been composed originally by persons who took no formal part in the Christian movement, and who were led to put these things into writing by a strong sense of their extraordinary character; in short, by the force of truth. There is that in the style and spirit of these writings, as I have sought to show, which gives color to this idea.

The foregoing remarks have chief reference to the first three Gospels. The difference between these and the fourth Gospel is obvious. John's Gospel has less of the impersonality which is so marked in the others. It is distinguished by the peculiarity of its introduction; by the distinct avowal of a special purpose;¹ by comments and explanations; by the fact that the scene of the events which it narrates is laid mostly in and near Jerusalem, while the incidents related in the other Gospels are mostly confined to Galilee; and by a style of discourse unlike what is elsewhere attributed to Jesus. I cannot undertake to account for these peculiarities. I can only suggest a few thoughts tending to elucidate them.

The Gospel of John illustrates an observation

¹ John xxi. 31.

which I have already had occasion to make, namely, that it is not easy for one disposed and able to form opinions of his own as to what he sees and hears, and earnestly desirous of making his opinions good, to represent things precisely as they were. His own ideas will be pretty sure to color his report. They will lead him to lay stress upon what confirms them, and to overlook what does not appear to be related to them. This Gospel shows us this; shows us how difficult it was for one, who, having known Jesus, could not but have formed a certain idea of him, an idea which, however near to the truth and exalted, must of necessity have been inadequate to represent Jesus exactly as he was, in short, to describe him objectively. No human mind can have any other than inadequate ideas of things, least of all, of such a being as Jesus. Hence this Gospel gives us in part, not the Jesus who walked about in Galilee and Judæa, but the idea of Jesus formed in the mind of the writer, and taking color therefrom, and consequently indirectly modified by the influences by which John's mind was affected, as all men's are, by their surroundings and by the modes of thinking popular at the time. Doubtless the conception which John formed of Jesus would have been substantially the same, had he

lived in a different age and under the influence of other circumstances, but it would have been the same with a difference. His Gospel is evidently the work of one who prepared it, as he states, with a distinct purpose, and who, from long observation of the persistent opposition of his countrymen, was led to dwell particularly upon the claims of Jesus as the Christ. Hence the prominence given to faith in Christ in this Gospel. Of the discourses attributed to Jesus by John, the most marked feature is a tendency to amplification, not characteristic of Jesus, but very natural in John, aiming to set forth what he understood to be the mind of his Master.

And yet, amidst these peculiarities, the same wonderful consistency that we find in the other Gospels is distinctly traceable in this Gospel. In the third chapter, which commences with a brief account of a conversation which Jesus had with a Jewish elder, we recognize the same thought, the same voice, that we hear in the third verse of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, while this portion of John's Gospel is evidently, and in great part, made up of the language and sentiments of the writer. See especially that part of this third chapter extending from the eleventh verse to the twenty-first inclusive, and giving us, not the language of

Jesus, but the language of John. "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" This is not such language as Jesus ever used. This is the phraseology of John and of the period in which John wrote. See also the fifth chapter, which begins with an account of the restoration of the infirm man, whom Jesus found lying by the fountain at Bethesda, and in which stands recorded the memorable reply that he returned to the superstitious clamor raised against him for discharging offices of humanity on the Sabbath, "My Father is always working, and so am I." The remainder of the chapter, following these words, shows traces of the style of John, thoughts and modes of expression belonging to the period immediately after that of Jesus, and employed by John to unfold what he held to be the mind of his Master. Once more the sixth chapter, while it is marked by the peculiarities of this Gospel, still shows us the same Jesus, with the same characteristic modes of thought and speech. The utterances of Jesus throughout all the Gospels are distinguishable by a habit of mind beautifully resulting from his overflowing spirituality. I refer to his habit of moulding the form of his thought in correspond-

ence to some present object or passing occurrence. So full was he of the truth, so interested was he in it, that he saw it in all sights, heard it in all sounds. This habit of mind is illustrated in this sixth chapter. The allusion made to the manna, upon which the Israelites were fed in the Desert, gives occasion to the long discourse here ascribed to Jesus concerning the bread of Heaven. I cannot venture to distinguish between the Master and his disciple. I hear the voices of both, distinct and yet in unison.

It must be remembered that John did not write as if he were upon his oath to report the exact words of Jesus. He wrote evidently to give his countrymen, whom he wished to convince that Jesus was the Christ, a right idea of his mind, his spirit. And in doing this, he gave his own understanding of Jesus in his own language. And his own thoughts and language are unconsciously modified by the condition and demands of the time.

The intermingling of the thoughts and words of John with those of Jesus in various passages of this Gospel, while it appears to some to obliterate the distinctive personality of Jesus, to my mind bears witness to the power of that personality, and causes John's work to be just

what we might expect from one of John's character in ardent sympathy with Jesus. It gives us the idea of Jesus reflected from the mind of John.

At the same time, the subjective character of the fourth Gospel enables us to perceive that, desirable as it may seem that the history of Jesus should have been written by his most intimate friends, they really were not so well qualified for the work as others who did not stand so near him, and who were not in haste, through the ardor of their personal feelings, to put their own construction upon his acts and sayings.¹ His immediate disciples could better report his life in that other and better way, in their own lives, than accurately repeat his history in words. They were too near him to see him as he was, apart from themselves. I think Peter could hardly have set himself deliberately at work to give the world an account of his Master, without being so overpowered by his personal feelings that we should have had a portraiture of Jesus not as he was, and as we now see him in the Gospels, but as Peter conceived of him, and as the conception of him was affected by Peter's

¹ As an instance of what is here meant, see John viii. 37-39, inclusive, where John undertakes to explain the words of Jesus, which appear to me to have a more comprehensive meaning than John gives them.

strong peculiarities of temperament. Unquestionably a Gospel according to that ardent Apostle would have been exceedingly interesting. But it would have been informed by the personality of Peter, as John's is by his, and would have given us probably a clearer idea of the writer than of his subject.

Strictly speaking, it is impossible that any series of events should be told with absolute exactness. All human reports and histories are affected by the minds they pass through. Singularly faithful as the Gospels are to the life of Christ, — no human writings were ever more faithful, — yet, composed, as it is evident that they were, by persons who wrote with the freedom and unconsciousness of children, it is impossible that their compositions should not show a strong Jewish coloring. In the unconstraint in which these books were written, those mental peculiarities, inseparable from the Jewish birth of their authors and wrought into them, an unconscious second nature, must necessarily have had free play, and consequently the marks that they have left may very often be very readily distinguished. I have faith that a time will come when, by means of sound and searching principles of criticism, the history of the Great Teacher will be cleansed, to the minutest of its

recorded particulars, from the Jewish hues with which it is unavoidably more or less dyed.

But to return to John's Gospel. After all, the peculiarities by which it is marked pertain only to portions of it. Elsewhere, in the story of the Raising of Lazarus, in the narrative contained in the thirteenth chapter, and in the whole history of the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, — thus, in the most important parts, — the writer disappears, just as the writers disappear in the other Gospels, and the same exquisite consistency is found pervading the story and making it one with itself, with truth and nature. Indeed, nowhere in all these four wondrous writings does the reality of the events related stand out more luminously visible, creating the most satisfying conviction of truth in the open mind, than in these portions of the Gospel of John just mentioned. It seems as if the scenes described had been transferred to the written page with the precision of an instantaneous photographic impression. It seems too as if the writer, — who elsewhere, where the things narrated and the sayings reported were of a less marked and concrete character, or his recollection of them were less distinct, naturally sought to make up for want of precise recollections, by amplification, — when he came to these

most striking passages, lost himself in them and in the vivid sense of reality which they had produced in his mind, and had hardly a syllable to breathe beyond what properly belonged to scenes so touching and so sublime.

In the All of things, the Life of Jesus of Nazareth is the fullest revelation that we have of Man and of God, the two highest existences that we know. No words can tell the worth of that Life to the world, or how important it is that he, who has been put at such a distance from us by false theologies and philosophies that his very existence has become unreal, should be seen as he is, the central light of human history, illustrating the deepest laws of Being, illuminating the human understanding, and nourishing the sacred life that is in us with food from heaven.




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